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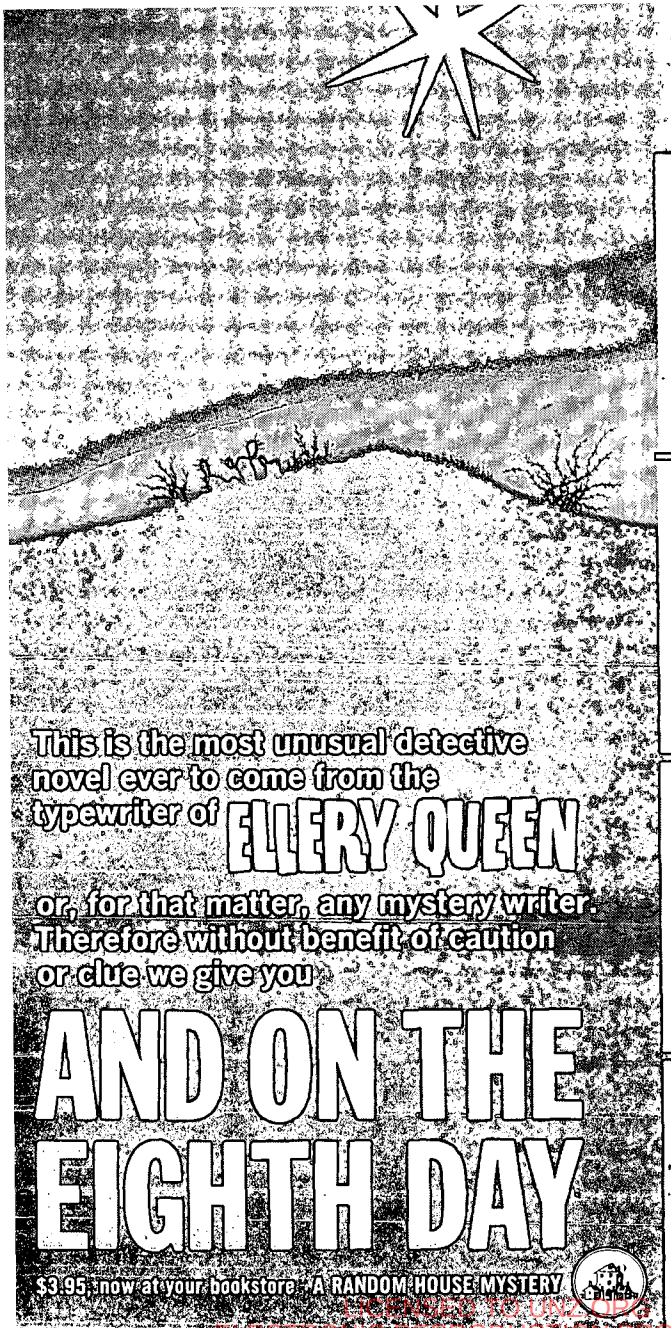
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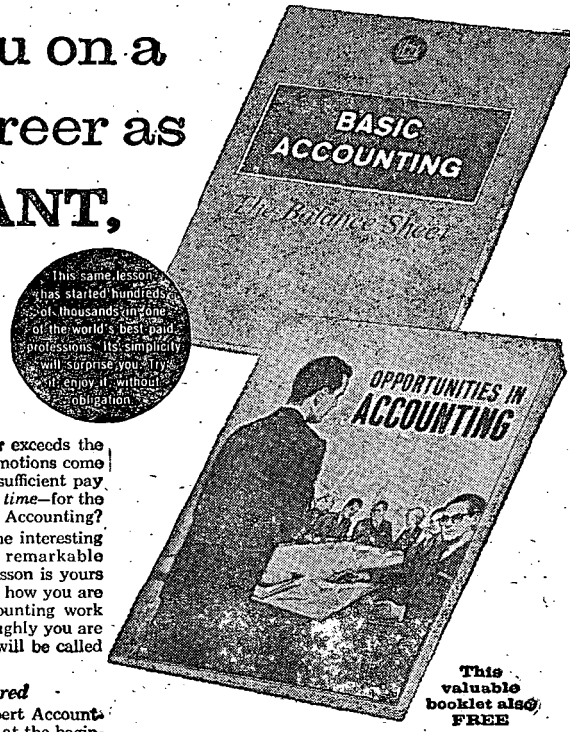
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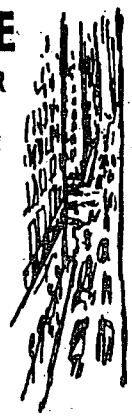

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PUBLISHER: *B. G. Davis* — EDITOR: *Ellery Queen*

*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, Vol. 43, No. 5, Whole No. 246, MAY, 1964. Published monthly by Davis Publications, Inc., at 50¢ a copy. Annual subscription $6.00 in U.S.A. and possessions and Canada; $7.00 in the Pan American Union; $7.00 in all other countries. Publication Office, 10 Ferry St., Concord, N. H. Editorial and General Office, 505 Park Ave., New York, N. Y. 10022 Change of address notices, undeliverable copies, orders for subscriptions, and other mail items are to be sent to 505 Park Ave., New York, N. Y. 10022 Second-Class postage paid at Concord, N. H.* *© 1964 by Davis Publications, Inc. All rights reserved. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention and the Pan American Copyright Convention.* *Printed in U.S.A. Submissions must be accompanied by stamped self-addressed envelope; the Publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts.*

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|---|---|
| AUTHOR: | CHARLOTTE ARMSTRONG |
| TITLE: | *Mink Coat, Very Cheap* |
| TYPE: | Crime and Detection |
| LOCALE: | United States |
| TIME: | The Present |
| COMMENTS: | *If one's days, said Anabel to herself, had no place in them for enchantment, then one might as well be dead . . . yes, it was a very foolish thing to do.* |

ANABEL SAID TO HER MOTHER, "Listen to this!"

Mrs. Simpson said, "I didn't sleep all night. Not a wink. All that money in the house. It's asking for trouble, Anabel."

"Mama, just listen." Anabel had the morning paper, and she read: " 'For sale: Mink coat, new, full length, very cheap for cash, if early Friday. 8416 Wilson.' "

"Oh, no," said her mother.

"Oh, Mama, you always say no."

"You have enough for a very nice stole and you know exactly where you've planned to buy it. You've even taken the money out."

"What harm can it do to go and look at this? On my way to work?"

"That would be a very *foolish* thing to do," said her mother. "It's not a good neighborhood."

"Oh, Mama, you don't know what kind of neighborhood—"

"Neither do you," said her mother tartly, "and you don't know fur, either."

"Just the same," said Anabel. She was twenty-one years old and her own mistress these days, what with her job and all.

"You couldn't possibly buy a new full-length mink coat for five hundred dollars," cried her mother.

"You never know," said Anabel airily. She looked at the clock. It did seem fateful. Here she was with all that cash, and this was very early Friday.



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Peering for house numbers, Anabel pulled her little old car up at an unfamiliar curb. The neighborhood was neither good nor bad, just nondescript. The house had two numbers on it.

Of course, this *was* silly.

Just the same, Anabel got out of her car. The newspaper in her right hand was folded back to the Classified section, where she had marked in green ink, with squiggly brackets, the tiny ad.

She stepped up two steps to the small porch. The door on her left was marked 8414. 8416 was upstairs —an arrow beside the number pointed up a flight of stairs. As she stood there hesitating, the door of the downstairs apartment cracked open. A morning paper was lying on the doormat, and a hand came forth and pulled the paper in.

Anabel panicked. So many other people got the newspaper! Was she too late? She went quickly up the flight of stairs and pressed the bell-button on the door up there.

She heard a thump of feet. The door opened to disclose a plump, short, blonde woman who said, "Yes?"

"I've come about the ad?"

"Oh, yes. Come in."

Anabel stepped in.

"You *are* early," the woman said, a little breathlessly. "Are you the only one?" She put her head out the door and looked downward.

"Yes, I am—I hope. May I see the coat?"

"Well, surely." The blonde woman closed the door, tossed a blonde lock out of her eye, clutched at her pink robe, and trotted away.

Anabel looked about her nervously, now that she was here. Maybe her mother was right. Maybe the coat *was* an old ratty thing, and how could Anabel tell? She had in the bag under her arm the $500 she had squirreled away bit by bit for a long time. Oh, this *was* silly! She had better go buy that stole. It was a bargain; the store was reputable.

But the blonde woman was back with the coat. "I suppose you'll want to try it on," she said.

Anabel, in a trance, put down her purse and her newspaper, took the coat, and slid her arms into its deliciously slippery sleeves. Well, now, either I'm crazy, thought Anabel, or this is absolutely *gorgeous*. Slipping her palm over the fur, she said, "How much?"

"How much will you give?" said the blonde woman. "I have to have cash. I mean, I said so."

"Five hundred dollars?" said Anabel hesitantly. "It's all I have."

"Now?" said the blonde. "In cash?"

"Yes."

"All right," the blonde said.

Anabel could hardly breathe. Her heart jumped and said, *Grab!* Her brain whirled. "It does look new," she murmured.

"Oh, it's new," said the blonde. "But I can't wear it." She sounded cross and in a hurry.

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Now Anabel realized, even in her daze, that the coat was just the right length for her, and this blonde woman was five inches shorter than she was. She said, "Isn't it your coat?"

"It wasn't made for me. I guess you'd call it—well, a gift. It's my sister-in-law's size, and *she'll* never wear it," said the woman, with thinned lips. "I happen to need cash right away, this morning. If you don't want it, there'll be somebody else who will."

"Oh, I want it," said Anabel quickly, feeling like the little pig who got up earlier than the wolf.

"Then why don't you take it?" The blonde woman's face was pale and lumpy—she was, on the whole a lumpy and dumpy little woman. The atmosphere in this place was stifling suddenly. Anabel took up her purse. She said, "Five hundred dollars?" Her fingers were cold and stiff.

The blonde woman said, "That's right. Well, thank you." Her pale, pudgy hand took the money, the hard-won money. Anabel stood shivering in the gorgeous fur. "It looks real good on you," the blonde said heartily. "You don't want me to wrap it up or anything, do you?" Her whole air said, I can't be bothered.

"Oh, no! I'll wear it," said Anabel.

"Well then, goodbye, dearie."

"I—" Anabel reached for whirling reason, "shouldn't I have a receipt or something."

"Oh, for heaven's sakes," said the blonde petulantly. "Where's a piece of paper?"

Anabel tore a corner off the newspaper.

"I haven't got a pencil either."

"Here." Anabel rummaged and handed over her own pen, the one filled with green ink.

So the woman scribbled on the blank margin of the piece of newsprint. "Sold to—what's your name, dear?"

"Anabel Simpson."

"Anabel Simpson, one mink coat, for five hundred dollars. B. Baldwin. Okay?" She held out the pen and the paper.

"Thank you so much, Miss . . . Mrs. Baldwin," said Anabel, taking them.

"Thank *you*," said the blonde, rolling her eyeballs. "You can get down by yourself, huh? I got to get dressed."

So Anabel, with her purse under her fur-clad arm, went out the door and down the stairs and into the street and into her car. And she got her key into the ignition somehow and drove away.

Whew!

Anabel drove, crying to herself, What have I done? Oh, what a foolish thing to do! Am I crazy? No, I'm not crazy. What a bargain! *Is* it a bargain? Oh, what have I done?

She drove, with as little wobbling as she could manage, into the parking lot convenient to her office. It was still early—barely eight forty.

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The office wouldn't be open until nine. Anabel parked and she sat.

She smoothed the fur. Now, in sunlight, she looked carefully at her purchase. But nothing was wrong with it. No signs of wear. The lining was perfectly beautiful, beige brocade, with two large blue embroidered initials, *A. M.* Which did not stand for B. Baldwin. But the coat had been made for her sister-in-law, the blonde had said. Well, *A. M.* did not stand for Anabel Simpson, either. Although the *A* could be an omen—a good omen.

Anabel sat there a full five minutes. Then she got out and gorgeous and sweltering in her long mink coat, she walked down the Avenue. She saw a familiar sign: KIMBERLY. FURS. Oh, that was a place too rich for Anabel's blood. How she had yearned into those windows! Wouldn't be open this early, of course . . . But it *was* open. Anabel stopped. A light burned inside and she could see the figure of a person.

Anabel thought, If this is rabbit or something and I've been cheated, all right, I *did* it. But I had better know.

She tried the door, which was locked. So she tapped on the glass. The figure inside heard, turned, and opened the door.

"I beg your pardon," said Anabel breathlessly, "but I need some advice."

"Why, then, come in," said the person, who was a young man.

"I suppose you appraise furs?"

"Yes."

"Then would you please tell me what this is that I have on?"

The young man smiled down at her. Anabel had black curly hair and cornflower blue eyes and skin like the petal of a rose. Many a young man had smiled at her. "If you'd take it off," said this young man, "maybe I could concentrate better."

So Anabel took off the mink coat.

The young man put the coat on a kind of counter. His fingers were reverent and knowledgeable. His eyes were knowledgeable.

"Is it mink?" breathed Anabel.

"Why, of course it's mink," he said with a smile.

"Oh. Oh! I don't dare tell you where I got it," she babbled. "Is it *good* mink?"

"I would be inclined to say so," he answered gravely. "Just a minute. Excuse me?" He went behind a partition and Anabel could hear his voice murmuring. He came back and said, "Let me show you something about fur, Miss—?"

"Simpson. Anabel Simpson."

"Miss Anabel Simpson."

So she hung over that counter, in the cool quiet air faintly flavored with some anti-moth chemical, watching his knowledgeable fingertips and listening to his knowledgeable voice. The door was locked, but she knew she was safe. This was a reputable place, and the young man was being most interesting, and very kind to explain in such detail how he knew that her beauti-

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ful coat was mink, well-made, and valuable.

She'd be late at the office, but who cared? Anabel, enchanted, said to herself that if one's days had no place in them for enchantment, then one might as well be dead.

Somebody tapped on the glass of the door. The young man said, "Excuse me?" and went to open it.

"You the man who called? Grange. Lieutenant. Police Department."

"Yes, sir," said Anabel's young man, suddenly very pale. "Lieutenant Grange, this is Miss Anabel Simpson, who has here one of the coats stolen from Carson Frères last June."

"Is that so?" said the police department.

"At retail," said the young man desperately, "that coat is worth about twelve thousand dollars. I'm sorry, Miss Simpson. I had to report this. It would have been very foolish not to . . ."

Anabel straightened up. "I see," she said. "Stolen? Of course, it was too good to be true." So much for enchantment. "Do you think *I* stole it?" She looked at them both.

The young man said, unhappily, "No."

The policeman, in a blue suit, with a pale gray eye, sounded neither happy nor unhappy. "If you didn't steal it, where did you get it?"

Anabel told him. She produced her receipt.

The policeman grunted. "We'd better get over there."

Somebody else had come from some inner room. Anabel's young man said to him, "Mind the store, Albert."

"Yes, Mr. Kimberly."

"Put that coat in a safe place," said the Lieutenant.

"Yes, sir."

"I have a car," said young Mr. Kimberly.

"I have a car," said Anabel.

"We'll go in mine," said the policeman.

So they went, in a dark sedan, from the dashboard of which the policeman removed a device on a tube and spoke cryptically into it. Anabel sat between them, chilly and shorn and disenchanted. Young Mr. Kimberly sat contrite and, though silent, still solicitous. The policeman just sat and drove.

"I don't suppose I'll even get my money back," said Anabel once, forlornly. Nobody answered. "Oh, well," she said, "it was a very foolish thing to do." Nobody answered this, either.

They stopped in front of the double house and Mr. Kimberly was gallant, helping Anabel out. Anabel was aloof. The policeman came around the police car and said, "Okay, let's go."

"It's upstairs," said Anabel, so they went upstairs right away.

The door of 8416 opened and a tall, thin, red-headed woman Anabel

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ad never seen before said, "Yes?"

"About this mink coat," began he policeman.

"I beg your pardon?"

"This young lady bought a coat rom you."

"I don't understand."

"She's not the one," said Anabel, eeling small and frightened.

"No?" said the Lieutenant. 'Where's Miss or Mrs. Baldwin?"

"There's nobody here by that ame," said the red-headed woman vith her groomed eyebrows high. 'My name is Spencer. Mrs. June Spencer."

"Is this the place?" demanded the oliceman.

"Oh, yes, this is the place," said Anabel.

"Mrs. Spencer, my name is Grange. Lieutenant, Police Depart-nent. Could we come in?"

"Well, I suppose so," said the red-eaded woman. "But I can't imagine vhat this is all about."

When they were all inside, the oliceman asked once more, "Is this he place?"

"Yes," said Anabel, looking around her. "I mean, I'm pretty ure. It looks just like it." She closed her eyes and said, "It must be."

The policeman's head shook, de-pairing of female positiveness. He aid to Mrs. Spencer, "This young lady bought a coat here earlier this morning—a mink for five hundred dollars."

"*Really*," said Mrs. Spencer with an embarrassed laugh, "I don't hap-pen to *have* a mink coat. Forgive me if I seem a little stupid. I just woke up twenty minutes ago."

"Nobody else lives here?"

"Why, no."

"How long have you lived here?"

"Oh, two years."

"Mind if I take a look around?"

"Well, no . . ." the woman said with a housewifely fluster.

The Lieutenant went through a door. Mrs. Spencer said, "Won't you sit down? Mr. . . . Miss . . . ?"

"Patrick Kimberly. This is Miss Simpson."

"What *is* this all about?"

"I don't quite know," said Mr. Kimberly stiffly. He guided Ana-bel's arm with a touch, and she sat down.

The Lieutenant was back almost at once. "Nobody else here." He fixed Anabel with his piercing gray eye. "What did your Mrs. Baldwin look like?"

"Short, blonde, dumpy," said Anabel, staring at tall, red-haired, slender Mrs. Spencer.

"I don't even *know* anyone like that," Mrs. Spencer said. "Surely there's been some mistake?"

"Seems to have been," he said, his pale eyes examining Anabel.

Anabel, who was getting mad, lifted her cornflower-blue gaze. "What about the ad in the news-paper?" she said crisply.

"Hmm. You got a morning paper, Ma'am?" inquired the policeman.

"No, I'm afraid I don't. I really don't understand."

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"You say there's no mink coat, no sale, no nothing?"

"Well I suppose that's what I say," said Mrs. Spencer helplessly. "I don't know what else to say. May I offer you some coffee?"

"No, thanks," said the Lieutenant. He beckoned with his chin. "Let's go," he said, and he led them out and down the stairs.

"If there's anything I can *do*," called Mrs. Spencer from above.

When they were back on the little porch, Anabel's cheeks were pink and her eyes full of blue fire. She said, "There is some flimflam going on here."

"I think so too," said Mr. Kimberly quickly.

"Yeah?" said the policeman. Again his pale eyes regarded Anabel.

So Anabel turned around and pushed the bell-button of 8414.

"What's this?" snapped the Lieutenant.

"The newspaper," cried Anabel. "I'll show you. There was a morning paper on this mat—"

8414 opened. "Yes?" the man said.

"May we see your paper?" Anabel demanded.

"My . . : huh?" The man looked bewildered.

"Lieutenant Grange. Police," said the detective, edging Anabel aside.

"Police!"

"You got the morning paper?"

"Well, I . . . Yeah," said the man. "What's up?"

"Much obliged if you'd let me have a look at it. Like to ask a couple of questions, too."

"Well, sure thing."

The man backed inward and the three of them entered the downstairs apartment.

"You the landlord here?" asked the Lieutenant, from some instinct.

"That's right. My name is Ferguson. Listen, what's the trouble, officer?"

"Oh, a little question's come up," said Lieutenant Grange. "Let's just see your paper, if you don't mind."

Ferguson plucked the paper off a table and held it out. The policeman allowed Anabel to take it. She dropped every section but the Classified. She turned pages in panic. What if there was no such ad? What if she had had some insane dream? Then her forefinger was shakily pointing. "See?"

Lieutenant Grange humphed in her right ear.

Mr. Kimberly was looking over her other shoulder, and he umhumphed in triumph into her left ear. Anabel felt much better.

Ferguson, who was a middle-aged man with very little hair, tea-colored eyes, and a hollow-chested stance, said, "What's going on, hey?"

Anabel stepped backward and felt her cheek being breathed on by Mr. Kimberly. He said softly, "I believed you."

She murmured, "There's something else, too—"

The Lieutenant was saying, "This young lady says she bought a

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valuable mink coat upstairs this morning."

"Upstairs?" said Ferguson. "From Mrs. Spencer? I dunno as I ever saw her with a mink."

"You never did, eh?" said the policeman. "You married, Mr. Ferguson?"

"Nope." Ferguson followed the Lieutenant's gaze with his own. A bag of knitting lay in the corner of an armchair. "My sister has been visiting me. But she took off for a few days to the beach."

"Mind if I look around?"

"Help yourself."

Again the policeman vanished through a door. Ferguson cast a worried glance at the two of them. Then he followed the Lieutenant, saying, "The bed ain't made. I hope you'll excuse it."

Mr. Kimberly said hurriedly to Anabel, "What something else, Miss Simpson?"

Anabel said, "This isn't the same man, either."

"Oh, *no*," he groaned, full of sympathy. "Are you sure?"

"It was a man's hand that I saw take in the paper. I saw his wrist. It had the watch on backwards. But this one's isn't." Anabel knew that she wasn't making much sense, but it didn't seem to matter because Mr. Kimberly felt so firm to her shoulder.

"There's some kind of flimflam going on," he said. "Now don't you worry!"

"But when it's not the same woman, and it's not the same man, but it *is* the same place . . ."

"Sssh," said Mr. Kimberly.

"Shall I tell the lieutenant? It sounds so—well, so crazy! Why wouldn't it be the same man *either?*" said Anabel. "I'm all confused."

"Of course you are," murmured Mr. Kimberly.

"He doesn't believe me, anyway. How could he?"

"Sssh," said Mr. Kimberly. "*I* believe you."

The Lieutenant and Ferguson came back. "No short, dumpy blonde, or anybody else," the Lieutenant said with a stern glance at Anabel. "Now, Miss Simpson, this is getting to look kind of peculiar."

"It certainly is," said Anabel, meeting his eye.

"We're going to have to check it out." The policeman turned to the landlord. "Your full name is Lester Ferguson? Right?

"Right."

"You own this building?"

"Yes, sir."

"How long?"

"Eight . . . no, nine years, I guess it will be, come November."

"And this Mrs. June Spencer, she's rented the upstairs for how long?"

"Couple of years, I'd say."

"And you don't know anything about any mink coat?"

"Sure don't, Lieutenant."

"Or the ad in the paper with this address?"

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"Must have been a misprint of some kind, I'd say."

The policeman blinked rapidly.

Mr. Kimberly said, "Maybe it was corrected in a later edition. Maybe Ana . . . Miss Simpson got the earlier edition."

"And maybe not, eh?" said the Lieutenant. "Well, Ferguson, we'll be talking to you again, probably."

"Any time," said Ferguson, and he enthusiastically opened the door to let them out.

Several people were bunched together on the porch, and a few more on the sidewalk. Mrs. Spencer was standing at the bottom of her stairs, very angry with five women and two men, who were all babbling at once, each one holding up a folded morning newspaper.

"Lieutenant Grange," she cried at the sight of him. "Will you *please* make these people go away? The ad is a *mistake*. I *didn't* put it in. I *have* no coat for sale!"

"That's right, folks," said the Lieutenant, shoving into their midst. "Looks like there's been a mistake here . . ." The people surrounded him, waving their newspapers.

Anabel was clutching Mr. Kimberly's sleeve. "That man. *He's* the man!"

"What man?"

"The man in the brown suit! He *is*. I *know!*"

Mr. Kimberly shoved forward and grasped the left wrist of the man in the brown suit, who was standing a little to one side with the newspaper in his hand, just watching and listening.

"Hey!" the man said, pulling.

"Uh-uh," said Mr. Kimberly, pulling the other way.

Then the two men were wrestling and the women were squealing.

Lieutenant Grange bellowed and two uniformed cops came running from a prowl car at the curb. Very quickly Mr. Kimberly was panting in the grasp of one of them, and the man in the brown suit was panting in the grasp of the other.

"Ladies," said Lieutenant Grange, "stand aside, *please*! Now," he fixed Mr. Kimberly with his pale fierce eye, "what do you think *you're* doing?"

Anabel had to defend her defender. She said, "That is the man who took the paper in."

"Huh?"

"Into 8414. Look at his watch."

The Lieutenant took the man's left wrist and turned it and humphed in a startled way.

"So?" the man snarled at him. He had long teeth in a lean pale face.

"He wears the strap outside," said Anabel, "and so did the hand that came out of the door and took the paper in."

"So?" the man snarled at her. "It's a crime to wear your watch on the inside of your wrist? What goes on here? I came to answer an ad in the paper. Listen, you'll hear from this, all of you!"

The uniformed men seemed to

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know that they ought not to let go yet. The Lieutenant stood there, stolid and skeptical, watching.

Young Mr. Kimberly was silent, too. He licked his lips and looked anxiously at Anabel. She was up to it. She said to Lieutenant Grange, "Pick up his newspaper."

"Huh?"

"There."

The Lieutenant looked down at the porch floor and saw a folded newspaper. "This one? How do you know it's his?"

"Well, isn't it?" said Anabel fiercely. "Look around."

The Lieutenant sent his pale glance through the small crowd. Sure enough, all the rest still had their papers, folded to the Classified, in their hands. "Well, so it's his," he said. "So what?"

"That's the point," cried Anabel. "It isn't *his* paper, it's *mine*. I left it behind me in her apartment upstairs. I'd marked the ad myself with green ink. The ad in the paper he dropped is marked in green ink. And here, see my pen? Green ink!"

"Oh, come on, what's with you?" said the stranger in the brown suit. "You the only one in the world who uses green ink?"

"Well, no," Anabel said, "but I always make those squiggles . . ." Oh, she knew, she *knew*. But how could she make them *believe?*

Mr. Kimberly said suddenly, "That receipt the woman wrote out for you, Miss Simpson. Wasn't it on a piece of newspaper?"

"Yes," Anabel said, realizing. "I tore it off a corner of my paper—"

"And the corner of *this* page is torn, Lieutenant," Mr. Kimberly said. "You've got the receipt. Why don't you match the two?"

Lieutenant Grange matched them. Then he slowly stuffed the receipt *and* the newspaper into his pocket. Breath came into Anabel. The lieutenant turned to Ferguson, who was standing in the doorway of 8414. "Do you know this man? Was he in your place this morning?"

"I don't know him," Ferguson said. "How could he have been in my place?"

Lieutenant Grange said to the red-headed woman who was still standing at the bottom of her stairs, "Do you know this man? Was he in your place this morning?"

"I don't know him," she said. "How could he have been in my place?"

Grange said to the man in the brown suit, "You weren't here? You know nothing? You're an innocent party?"

"Right," snapped the man.

"Well, then," the Lieutenant said, "you won't mind showing me your bill of sale or receipt for that Patek-Philippe watch you've got on?"

The man in the brown suit stood still. Everybody stood still. Then the man said, "Better go two blocks up and take the left turn into the park. In my green two-door . . ."

"Yeah?" the Lieutenant said.

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"My wife's in the trunk. Why should she smother or something?"

The red-headed woman shrieked to the man in the brown suit, "Harry . . ."

Ferguson said, "Oh, for crumb's sake, sis. I told you you couldn't work a switch. I told you to lay off messing around with a married man."

"How could Harry and me know that stupid blonde wife of his would get mad at us and sell the damn coat!" screeched the red-headed woman. "She knew it was hot."

"Kindly shut up," said the man in the brown suit to his fellow-conspirators. "Kindly *shut up*."

The policeman who dropped Mr. Kimberly and Miss Simpson off at the fur shop took the mink coat away. Anabel didn't watch it go; she couldn't. Mr. Kimberly was saying not to go to her office, she was too upset. He would bring coffee.

So over the coffee in this cool and reputable place, Mr. Kimberly explained. "Harry and his wife, the blonde, were thieves, lying low in 8416. The red-headed woman—landlord Ferguson's sister—and Harry got together. So the blonde wife decided to walk out on him, as she told the Lieutenant."

"She needed money?" Anabel said.

"And sold a stolen coat. Pretty stupid."

"Oh, I don't know," said Anabel dreamily. "It didn't fit her anyway."

"Women!" exclaimed Mr. Kimberly. Then hastily, "Not *you*, of course."

"We're kind of impulsive," said Anabel. "I was."

"You're a darling," said Mr. Kimberly, not too much under his breath.

"But what *you* did! Oh, Mr. Kimberly, that was a very foolish thing to do—"

"Pat . . ."

"Pat, it wasn't very wise of you to grab that criminal just because *I* said—"

"Yes, it was," said Mr. Kimberly. "It was the wisest thing I probably ever did."

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**NEW DETECTIVE SHORT NOVEL — *complete!***

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*In this new detective short novel Julian Symons takes you behind the scenes at world-famous Wimbledon, at the time of the Wimbledon international tennis championship. After the young British star, Jimmy Clayton, has scored a sensational upset, events move quickly and ominously—with international complications . . . Now, renew your acquaintance with Francis Quarles, the private inquiry agent who has appeared before in EQMM, and meet a newcomer, Mervyn Briffitt, a very-English and very-important-person of Her Majesty's counterespionage system . . .*

# THE WIMBLEDON MYSTERY

*by JULIAN SYMONS*

YOUNG JIMMY CLAYTON, HIS RED hair brilliant in the sunshine, a small brown zipper bag in his hand, jumped out of a car and pushed his way through a crowd of autograph seekers into the entrance hall of the All England Lawn Tennis Club.

There a tall, thin, tense-looking man hurried up to him. This was Bobo Williams, coach to a generation of British tennis players, among whom Jimmy Clayton was one of the few bright stars.

"Where have you been, Jimmy? We've been searching all over for you. Do you know Parker's two sets up on Van Damm, and you're on after them."

Jimmy flashed him a beaming smile. "And here I am."

"Really, this is no way to prepare—but I won't say anything more now. After you've beaten Gladkov, young man, you and I are going to have a talk."

"Oh, after I've beaten Gladkov," Jimmy said mockingly. "If I don't get changed I shan't get on court with Gladkov. Come on."

He led the way past the two R.A.F. boys on guard at the door of the men's dressing room. "Mr. Clayton," one of them said, "can I have your—?"

"Later, maybe. At the moment my hand's quivering like a leaf in autumn."

The chief men's dressing room at Wimbledon is big—it has to accommodate some ninety players during the championship—and is split down the center by a row of lockers. At one end of the room are showers and bathrooms, at the other end the cubicles where physiotherapists practice their magical arts of revival. A big television set shows the course of play for those who prefer chatting in the dressing room to watching the reality in the players' stand on the center court.

Several players were grouped round this set now, and they greeted Clayton

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cheerfully, and even warmly. For there was something very special about the match Jimmy Clayton was playing this afternoon. He was meeting the first player from the Soviet Union ever to have a chance of winning the men's singles at Wimbledon.

This was Sergei Gladkov, who had quickly become known as the Bear, partly for national reasons and partly because of a deep growl which he uttered on court when things were going wrong. Not that much had gone wrong for Gladkov. Unknown and unseeded, he had reached the last eight without losing a set.

"Better get ready for the Bear, Jimmy," said his doubles partner, Joe Richards. "He's waiting for you now."

"Just waiting to eat you up," somebody else said.

Jimmy had opened his locker, and was quickly changing. Joe Richards patted him on the shoulder. "He won't eat you up, eh, Jimmy? You'll be a pretty tough meal."

Jimmy Clayton merely grinned. Bobo Williams hovered round nervously while he changed. "Now you will remember the tactics we agreed on. His defense is like a wall, you cannot hit past him. Slow up the game, induce him to make mistakes. Don't take things lightly."

"Look, Bobo, I appreciate all you've done for me as a player. But I want to win this championship more than I've ever wanted to do anything. I shan't take it lightly. Satisfied?"

"I suppose so," the other said, and sighed. "After the match we shall plan your tactics against Parker in the semi-final."

The dressing-room attendant called out, "Parker two sets up and leading four-one in the third, Mr. Clayton."

"All right. I'm off." Jimmy Clayton went out of the dressing room and up the steps which, during the tournament, may be used only by those playing on the center court. He pushed open a door and entered the anteroom where Gladkov was already sitting, reading a book. The Russian nodded to him, unsmilingly.

Five minutes later the doors from the center court opened, and the American champion, Harry Parker, who obstinately refused to turn professional, and the big Dutchman van Damm came through them.

"Well played, Harry," Jimmy Clayton said. He added, with his grin, "I hope you have the chance to do the same to me."

"Good luck, Jimmy," Parker said. Then he had gone through the door toward the dressing room, and Jimmy Clayton stepped out onto the center court.

He felt nervous. But once there, once he had bowed to the Duchess of Kent in the Royal box and got the feel of the place, the feel of the crowd rising in massed tiers away from him, once he had absorbed the sensation of being a focal point of attention for thousands of people sitting round this arena, the women radiant in summer dresses, the men using handkerchiefs to protect themselves from the burning sun, Jimmy Clayton was nervous no longer.

He picked up the balls and crashed in his first service, forgetful of everything except that there was a job to be done.

And it was a real job. Gladkov was a player in the pattern of the great Frenchman, René Lacoste. His defense seemed impregnable, his position play

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was so perfect that he seemed hardly ever to be out of place. Brought up to the net he volleyed, not very powerfully, but with great deftness and cunning. Only overhead did he seem fallible, and Jimmy had agreed with Bobo Williams to feed this apparent weakness with lobs, and to slow up his own natural game in the hope of upsetting Gladkov.

He tried this in the first set, and lost it six-two. Gladkov put away everything lobbed up to him, not so much by power as by intelligent angling of the ball. In the long rallies played at little more than half pace it was not he but Jimmy who made the mistakes.

The crowd, eager to applaud their own player, were slowly silenced. Jimmy could see Bobo Williams biting his nails. In the players' stand there was some shaking of heads. Everybody liked young Jimmy Clayton, but few had supposed that he really stood much chance against the Russian machine.

As they toweled themselves at the end of the set Gladkov smiled at him. The smile was harmless enough, no doubt, even perhaps a friendly smile, but it annoyed Jimmy Clayton by its apparent assumption of superiority.

"I don't care what we agreed," he thought. "I'm going out for my strokes."

He went all out. He stopped lobbing, stepped up the pace of his game, forced his way to the net. He played for the sidelines, determined to make this Russian move.

And he succeeded. He had his luck, in the way of balls that dropped inches in when they might have been inches out. But he succeeded, playing better than he had ever played in his life.

By the end of the second set, which Jimmy won six-three, Gladkov was growling with anger.

In the third set the Russian made a great effort, and even speeded up his own game, pulling up from three-five to five-all. But when Jimmy took the next two games, Gladkov began to show signs of fallible humanity. In the fourth set he made mistakes, and Jimmy took it six-two to the applause of an almost hysterical crowd that was cheering every point he won.

Back in the dressing room again, he found himself the center of a cheering, laughing crowd of players. Bobo Williams had tears in his eyes. "Jimmy, you were great, you were great."

"I'm just off to have a shower."

"Yes, have a shower. Then we shall talk. About when you play Parker on Wednesday, the day after tomorrow. Today you were inspired, but—"

"We'll talk," Jimmy agreed. He waved his hand, and disappeared into the bathrooms.

Bobo Williams found himself involved in the crowd of players talking about the match, and about Jimmy's brilliance. It was nearly half an hour before he became aware that Jimmy had not reappeared. He tapped on the door of the bathroom Jimmy had used, then turned the handle.

It was unlocked, and empty.

Bobo went into the physiotherapists' cubicles. Jimmy was not there.

"Typical," Bobo said aloud. "Just typical. Skipped off to enjoy himself before we could have our talk."

To make sure, he spoke to the R.A.F. boys on duty at the main exit. They looked at him blankly. "Mr. Clayton's not come out of here, sir," one of them said. "I've been waiting to get his autograph."

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There is another exit, at the other end of the dressing room, also watched by R.A.F. men. Bobo went to it, and was assured that Jimmy Clayton had not come out in the past half hour.

"Couldn't miss him, not with that flaming red hair. Besides, look at the crowd out there waiting to see him."

Bobo was puzzled. "I say, have any of you seen Jimmy come out of the bathroom?" he asked the assembled players. None of them had. "That's a funny thing," Bobo said hesitantly. "He seems to have disappeared."

At first nobody took Jimmy's disappearance very seriously. Bobo Williams was well known to be an old fusspot, and Jimmy could hardly be blamed for getting away from him for an hour or two. In any case, it was generally recognized that Jimmy was a pretty wild and unpredictable character.

So, although Bobo was running around like a scalded cat saying that this was a mystery, nobody paid much attention until Rita Foldes came round to the entrance hall, and met the anxious Bobo.

"Miss Foldes," he said, "have you seen Jimmy? He seems to have disappeared."

"Disappeared?" Rita Foldes was a tall dark girl with beautiful eyes which were suddenly wide with alarm.

"If he'd come out he would have come round to see you," Bobo said. Rita Foldes had become engaged to Jimmy three months back.

"Perhaps not." She spoke perfect English, with no more than a slight accent. "I told Jimmy I might not be able to come. In fact, I got here in the middle of the second set. If you will excuse me I will telephone Jimmy's mother. Perhaps he has gone home."

When she had left them, Bobo Williams said in a voice that was almost a wail, "But he *can't* have gone home. He didn't leave the dressing room."

Joe Richards came up to him. "Why are you looking so solemn? And where's Jimmy?"

"He isn't in the dressing room. And he never left it."

Joe Richards burst out laughing. "Ah, that's one of Jimmy's jokes. You know how he loves a joke."

Rita Foldes came back to them. "Jimmy's not at home. Mrs. Clayton hasn't heard from him since the match."

"Look here," Richards said, "let's make sure Jimmy isn't playing some trick on us. We'll talk to those boys on the doors and have a look in the dressing room. Then we'll come back to you, Miss Foldes."

They talked to the boys on both doors, who repeated with vigor their statements that red-haired, volatile Jimmy Clayton had not come out of the two doors. They searched the dressing room in vain. They looked in Jimmy's locker which contained nothing at all, not even his tennis clothes.

Jimmy Clayton had disappeared.

Later that evening Bobo Williams telephoned Mrs. Clayton. And Mrs. Clayton telephoned detective Francis Quarles.

Francis Quarles was at home when the telephone call came. He was eating dinner, which consisted of an *entrecôte* steak with green salad, accompanied by a glass of claret. While he ate he read a newspaper story headed "Jimmy Lionheart beats the Russian Bear."

He finished the steak and followed it

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with Stilton cheese and black coffee. Then he discovered from *Who's Who* that Evelyn Arabella Clayton was the widow of George Morley Clayton of Clayton's Breweries, who had died in 1947, and that James Morley Clayton was their only surviving son. Clearly there was money in the family. Quarles took a taxi to Mrs. Clayton's house in Eaton Square.

Mrs. Clayton was a square faced practical-looking woman in her fifties. She received Quarles in a large, badly lit drawing room, furnished in no particular sort of taste. His attention was caught by a full-length portrait that hung over the fireplace, a portrait that showed a young man wearing Army uniform leaning negligently against a bookcase.

There was nothing particularly notable about the picture, but Quarles' attention was caught by the mocking smile on the young man's face, and the fact that he had bright red hair.

He was brought back to the present by Mrs. Clayton, who spoke in a voice as decisive as her appearance.

"Mr. Quarles. It seems that my son James has disappeared. At least, Mr. Williams here believes so. I am by no means convinced that this is not some prank on his part. He is what you might call a rather wild young man. But Mr. Williams is convinced that he is right. He had better tell you his story. Then, if it proves that James has really disappeared I should like you to find him."

Quarles, amused rather than annoyed by this would-be imperial arrogance, listened to Williams' story. At the end of it he said, "But that's impossible."

"Precisely, Mr. Quarles. How do you explain it?" There was sharpness in Mrs. Clayton's voice.

"I don't. I have no data for doing so. I merely say that it is impossible. Your son is engaged to be married, I believe."

"He considers himself so. I have told him that I do not approve."

"Why not?"

"When I die, Mr. Quarles, my son will be rich. I have ambitions for him. Miss Foldes is a perfectly pleasant girl, but her family lives here in exile. As far as I can see, they are never likely to return to their country. It does not appear to me a suitable match."

"Isn't that a rather out-of-date attitude?"

She was unperturbed. "I may be a rather out of-date person, Mr. Quarles. James is always telling me so. I also object to Miss Foldes' previous engagement—"

"Come on, Aunt Evelyn, don't be so stuffy."

From the shadows of the room, where he had been only dimly visible, came a young man wearing a dark gray suit and a flowered waistcoat.

"She's going to tell you that Rita was engaged to me, but that's all over and done with. My name's Dobson, by the way—Ronny Dobson. And Mrs. Clayton isn't my aunt, though I've known her so long she seems like one. I've known the Clayton family for ages, and so has Rita."

"Thank you, Mr. Dobson . . . Do you know any reason why your son should want to disappear, Mrs. Clayton? Was he worried about anything?"

"No. In fact, he seemed rather more cheerful than usual, and he was always cheerful."

"Is that he?" Quarles made a gesture at the painting over the fireplace.

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"No," said Mrs. Clayton flatly.

Ronny Dobson rocked with laughter. "Really, Aunt Evelyn, it's no use trying to hide the skeleton in the cupboard. That's Ralph, Jimmy's older brother. Jimmy adored him, still does. Ralph became a regular soldier, went over to Korea. He was captured, submitted to brainwashing, and—well, he played ball with the Chinese. British prisoners who came back told how he ran lecture classes and even took part in interrogations, sitting by the side of the Chinese and North Korean officers. They didn't like it, the other prisoners. Some of them were quite savage about what they were going to do to him."

"Ralph's dead," Mrs. Clayton said harshly. "He was killed in one of our bombing raids. He can have nothing to do with this."

"Is he dead?" Ronny Dobson asked softly. "Jimmy never believed Ralph was dead. Or, for that matter, believed he was a traitor. You know that."

Quarles had the curious feeling that there was some other, uncomfortable presence in the dimly lit room. He looked again at the figure in khaki, who stared back with his mocking smile. "When did your son die, Mrs. Clayton?"

"At the end of the war he was not returned with other prisoners. The Chinese authorities said he had been killed in a bombing raid. Ralph was not a bad boy, Mr. Quarles. He was reckless, that is all."

"And Jimmy admired him?"

"Yes. Ralph was three years older and James copied him in everything, even in his enjoyment of ridiculous practical jokes." In Mrs. Clayton's hard face there was some tenderness, as she spoke of her older son.

"This may be a practical joke." Quarles looked at his watch. "It is now half-past nine. Jimmy has, after all, been missing for only five hours. He may be back in the morning."

"He *must* be back," Bobo Williams said. "Tomorrow he has to play in the men's doubles, and on Wednesday there is his semifinal against Parker."

"Do you think we should telephone the police?" Mrs. Clayton asked.

"Yes," Quarles said without hesitation. "In fact, I will telephone them myself. And I think we should go down to Wimbledon tonight to look at this dressing room from which a man can so simply disappear. I happen to know Colonel Macaulay, the secretary of the All England Club. I'll telephone him too."

"I say, can I drive you down?" Ronny Dobson asked. "A real-life investigation sounds like simply terrific fun."

"Do, by all means, although you'll probably find it extremely dull."

They reached Wimbledon quickly in Ronny Dobson's Jaguar. At night the place was oddly ghostlike. The deserted courts and pavilion, stripped of crowd and players, seemed somehow purposeless.

Colonel Macaulay met them at the gate. He was pleasant but skeptical. "I'm very willing to help, Quarles, but I can't help feeling that this is all a fuss about nothing. I should imagine young Jimmy has gone off somewhere for a little quiet celebration. Unwise perhaps, but very understandable."

"I tell you he never left the dressing room," Bobo Williams said, almost crying. "I believe he is somewhere in there now—dead."

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"Nonsense, man," Colonel Macaulay said.

Three-quarters of an hour later they had searched the dressing room thoroughly, without finding any body. In the bathroom used by Jimmy Clayton, Quarles had, however, discovered something of interest.

There was a window in this bathroom and on the inside paintwork of the sill Quarles saw four longitudinal scratches, freshly made. He also found on the floor just under the window several fair silky hairs which he examined carefully, and put into an envelope.

"Those aren't Jimmy's," Bobo Williams said immediately. "His is red."

Quarles smiled slightly. "I realized that." He opened the window and peered outside. "What is out here, Colonel Macaulay?"

"This particular window leads to a side passage, which isn't much used."

"Ha. And the other bathroom windows, do they lead in a similar way—?"

"No," Colonel Macaulay said promptly. "Most of the others have no windows, or small ones. This is the only room of its kind."

Quarles seemed in an excellent temper. "You all see the significance of that, naturally?"

They looked at him blankly.

"Those scratches," Ronny Dobson said. "They look as if they might have been made by studs in shoes. Yet that window isn't big enough for anyone to climb out of."

Quarles beamed at him benevolently. "You are quite right, young man. A curious contradiction, is it not? One further question, Colonel Macaulay. You have R.A.F. boys on guard at the doors. How do they recognize those who have a right to come in?"

"By their badges. Absolutely the only people allowed in this dressing room are the competitors, who have a blue cardboard badge, and the club members like Bobo here who wear a mauve and green badge. Our organization is only human, of course, but we do keep a very careful check on everybody who comes in."

"Do you check equally carefully those who go out?"

Colonel Macaulay was momentarily disconcerted. "Why, no, I don't suppose we do. I really don't know. But anybody as distinctive-looking as Jimmy Clayton would certainly be noticed —in fact, I believe a lot of people were hanging around, waiting for him to come out."

Quarles nodded, looking like a very large and self-satisfied cat. "Well, gentlemen, I don't think there's much doubt about what happened. Jimmy Clayton—"

But they were not destined to hear at this time Quarles' ideas about what had happened to Jimmy Clayton. In the stillness outside came the sound of a car stopping. A voice called, "Hallo there. Is anybody about?"

They went outside to see two figures standing by a police car. One of them stepped forward, a grizzled man, square and chunky. "Colonel Macaulay? We were told we should find you here. My name's Leeds, Inspector Leeds, C.I.D. Evening, Quarles."

"Good evening." Quarles was staring at the man with Leeds, who still stood by the car. He went on staring as Inspector Leeds said that they would like to have a look round, and Colonel Macaulay told him that Mr. Quarles didn't seem to take the affair very seriously.

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"Ah, Mr. Quarles has ideas of his own," the Inspector said, like a man talking about his favorite nephew. "Very ingenious they are, too, sometimes—and very eccentric."

"I think I must have been wrong," Quarles said. He addressed the man by the car directly. "What in the world are you doing here?"

"This is my colleague Mervyn Briffitt," Inspector Leeds said. "He is interested in the matter from another aspect."

Mervyn Briffitt was a small rosy man with fair curling hair which he wore rather longer than is fashionable, and a long, drooping, silky mustache. Quarles drew him aside as the others went on again to the dressing-room. "Why are you here? What has a disappearing tennis player to do with one of the most important representatives of our counterespionage system?"

Briffitt smiled and stroked his silky mustache. He had a pleasant but slightly affected voice. "You flatter me, Quarles. In itself, Clayton's disappearance doesn't interest me at all."

"Then why are you here?"

"Jimmy Clayton is engaged to a girl named Rita Foldes. Did you know that?"

"Yes. Her family is in exile from—" And he named the particular Communist-ruled central European state from which the Foldeses had escaped.

"And her father, Doctor Foldes, used to be Minister of State before the Communists took over and he got out. Did you know that?"

"No. Why should I? What's it got to do with Jimmy Clayton?"

"Nothing perhaps." Briffitt stroked his mustache again. "But Doctor Foldes disappeared yesterday evening—walked out of his flat and vanished. Today Jimmy Clayton, who's engaged to marry his daughter, disappears too. Rather a coincidence, don't you think?"

Mervyn Briffitt said very little as they looked round the dressing room and bathroom yet again, but in some indefinable way the little rosy-faced man with the fair mustache took charge of proceedings.

When they had finished, Inspector Leeds said, "I can handle the routine aspects of this, but I think it's really your pigeon."

"I think so too. I'd like you all to keep quiet about it. And I'd like it kept out of the papers."

"But Jimmy's playing in the doubles tomorrow," Bobo Williams protested. "If he's not here he'll have to scratch."

"My dear Mr. Williams," Briffitt said in his slightly affected voice. "I can assure you that I have more important things to worry about than whether this young man plays in a tennis match. Now, the night is young. I think it might be useful to have a little talk. Are you free, Quarles?"

Quarles looked at his watch. The time was half-past eleven, and he had been up playing poker until four o'clock in the morning. "Of course."

"Good. You are Mr. Dobson, aren't you?" Ronny Dobson started slightly, pulled at his flowered waistcoat, and admitted it. "Can you come along too? I've got a little flat just off Piccadilly and my man will make us a cup of coffee."

A little more than half an hour later the three of them were in the living room of Briffitt's flat, drinking hot

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black coffee. It was the room of a man of taste, although the taste was slightly unusual. One wall of this room held Victorian conversation pieces, pictures of a kind that are just coming back into fashion; another held drawings and paintings, equally perverse, by Beardsley and Leonore Fini. Miro shared a third wall with some Japanese prints. With the coffee they drank cognac.

"I have asked you to come here, Quarles, because within its limitations I respect your intelligence," Briffitt said.

"I am grateful for the compliment." Quarles had sunk into a big armchair and his eyes were almost closed.

"Besides, this is certainly not a case for ordinary police methods. There are possible diplomatic reactions. No doubt you came to a certain conclusion from what you saw in the dressing room."

"I did," Quarles said doubtfully. "The position of this particular bathroom, the scratches, the hairs, the zipper bag—you know about the zipper bag?" Briffitt nodded. "They all seemed to lead to one conclusion. But I don't understand Doctor Foldes' disappearance, or any of the rest of it, so perhaps my ideas are wrong. Frankly, I don't even understand why Mr. Dobson is here."

"Perhaps I can help," Briffitt said with a faint smile. "Doctor Foldes is one of the most distinguished of his country's exiles. He is chairman of the Committee for National Liberation—that is the exiles' organization through which they hope one day to regain power. Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Rumania—all these countries have their little groups of fanatical anti-Communist exiles. They talk and talk, scheme and plot, send emissaries home to make contacts and form cells—the usual kind of thing. It is part of my job to keep an eye on them."

"Where does Mr. Dobson come in?"

"Mr. Dobson?" Briffitt looked down at his coffee. "He is also a member of the Committee for National Liberation. He came to this country eight years ago, and his name then was Dombos."

Ronny Dobson laughed. "I speak English pretty well, don't I? I used to come over every year when I was a boy. My family was friendly with the Claytons and I often stayed with them. You are surprised, Mr. Quarles? But it sometimes pays to look a little foolish, and also to appear more English than the English."

Briffitt took a packet of black cigarettes out of his pocket, put one in a holder and lit it. "Recent happenings have caused splits in several of these committees. With the new line, the end of the cult of personality, the release of a good many prisoners, great pressure is being put onto some of the more distinguished exiles to go back. Foldes was one of them. He was visited last week—quite unofficially, of course—by somebody from his country's legation. Probably he was offered a place in the government if he went back. My information is that he had not finally made up his mind."

"Where does your information come from?"

Briffitt waved a hand. "Dobson here is a dedicated anti-Communist. He works with us from time to time, although I don't publicly acknowledge acquaintance with him. Now, yesterday evening Foldes walked out of his flat. He has not been heard of since then."

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"You think he has gone back?"

"That is a possibility. There are certain things against it. His daughter Rita says that he would not have gone without telling her. He took no papers, packed no bag. But still, perhaps he has gone. Or perhaps he has been kidnaped by government agents over here. Or perhaps he has been killed by them. I should very much like to know which."

"And where does Jimmy Clayton come in?"

"Ah ha." Briffitt leaned back in his chair, pleased with his own subtlety. "Jimmy is engaged to Foldes' daughter. Jimmy has a brother named Ralph, who is presumed to be dead. Jimmy disappears. Don't those facts suggest anything to you, Quarles?"

With his eyes closed, Quarles murmured, "Not very much."

"I am disappointed. Your mind is less flexible than I had hoped. It suggests to me that Ralph Clayton is still alive, that he is the go-between employed to persuade Foldes to return and that somehow he has employed Jimmy as his tool. Now, the fact that Jimmy Clayton has disappeared suggests further that Ralph Clayton has run into some trouble. That means Foldes is probably still in England. If he is," Briffitt deliberately stubbed out his cigarette and put away the holder, "we're going to find him."

Quarles said nothing. Ronny Dobson began to walk up and down the room. "It fits, you know, it fits. I'm pretty friendly with Jimmy even though he did take my girl away from me. Best man won, and all that. This morning he was very excited, told me he had some wonderful news, but couldn't give me any details."

"You don't think it was about tennis?" Briffitt asked.

"I doubt it. He knew I wouldn't be much interested in that. I'm sure it was something more personal."

"I gathered from Mrs. Clayton that Ralph's death was well established," Quarles said.

Briffitt waved a hand. "Not finally. His body was supposed to have been seen, and the Chinese said he'd been killed in a bombing raid. But isn't that exactly what they would have said if they intended to use him as an agent?"

"Perhaps. I'm afraid you're too subtle for me." Briffitt looked sharply at him, but Quarles showed no sign of having spoken ironically. "We shall all feel a little foolish if Jimmy Clayton turns up in the morning, safe and sound. If he doesn't, I'm prepared to concede that there may be something in your theory. Good-night."

In the morning Jimmy Clayton had not returned, and his mother had no news of him. Quarles arrived at his office just after half-past nine and his secretary, pert Molly Player, said disapprovingly, "You're late. Somebody here to see you. Her name's Rita Foldes. Upset, but she's a smasher."

"Thank you for all that information. Ask Miss Foldes to come in."

Looking at her across his big desk, Quarles on the whole agreed with his secretary. Rita Foldes' eyes had shadows round them, but they were still remarkable eyes, dark and lustrous. Her brows were thick, her cheekbones high, and she had that darkly brooding look, rather like that of a bad English tragic actress, which in real life seems to belong exclusively to central and eastern Europeans.

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She was the sort of woman, Quarles eflected, capable of immense self-acrifice, passionate love—and pas-ionate hatred.

She spoke now, abruptly. "Mr. Quarles, I talked to Ronny this morn-ng and he told me you were going to ry to find Jimmy. There is something have to tell you."

She stared at him with painful ntensity. The one flaw in her beauty, ie thought, was that she might develop mustache in later life.

"It is something he said I was not to ell anybody."

"My dear Miss Foldes," he said a ittle impatiently, "please make up our mind whether you are going to ell me this secret. If you are not going o tell me you are wasting my time, as vell as your own."

She looked at him reproachfully. 'Jimmy's brother Ralph is still alive. immy heard from him yesterday. Is hat important?"

"Very important. Tell me the letails."

"Jimmy came in to see me yesterday norning. He was excited—oh, so ex-ited. He said to me—I must try to emember the exact words—he said, I have had a telephone call from Ralph, Rita. He is still alive. I am going to neet him.' "

"You are sure of those words?"

"I am quite sure, yes. Then he said hat I must not tell anybody. He said, Ralph says I am not to tell anyone at ll, but that can't mean you, Rita. But you promise to say nothing.' I promised." Her voice faltered.

"I am sure he will forgive you. Now, Miss Foldes, you knew Ralph Clayton. What did you think of him?"

She spoke hesitantly. "It is difficult. I have known them a long time—we used to come here for holidays when we were children. Then I did not think anything of Jimmy—he was just the younger brother, you understand."

"But Ralph?"

"Ralph was very charming. He was attractive to women, you know. He was a good talker, played games well, made you feel that you were important to him. And yet—I do not know how to put this so that you understand it—there was always something strange in him, something detached."

"You were not surprised to learn that he had gone over to the Communists?"

"I was shocked, yes. But surprised?" The shrug of her shoulders indicated resignation. "It is the world we live in. Then I came here with my father in 1948, and for a long time I did not meet Jimmy again. I was engaged to Ronny Dobson. But when I met Jimmy again —I knew there could be nobody else."

Quarles leaned forward, large hands stretched palm downward on the desk. "Now, Miss Foldes, I want you to answer this question, although you may think it a strange one. Suppose Jimmy had the choice of meeting you after a long period of absence, meeting his brother after a long period of absence, or playing in the semifinal at Wimbledon—which would he do?"

A smile twitched at the corner of her mouth. "You are joking. It is your English sense of humor."

"Not at all. I was never more serious."

"Then I must be serious too." She thought a moment, finger on chin. "It is ridiculous, of course. I shall never understand the English. But I think he would have played the tennis match."

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Quarles sighed, whether from suppressed interest, fatigue, or boredom it would have been hard to say. From the outer office a noise could be heard, a scuffle, a chair overturning, Molly Player's voice raised in protest. Then the door between Quarles's office and his secretary's room opened.

A young man stood there, looking at them, head slightly down like a bull about to charge. He was dark-featured and strikingly handsome, and his resemblance to Rita Foldes was obvious. A revolver gleamed bluely in his hand. His voice was strongly accented. "What has she been telling you?"

"My dear young man, you must put that revolver down."

"You have been telling him secrets, fool?" the young man said angrily.

"*Put that down,*" Quarles said.

The young man raised the gun slowly, and pointed it at Quarles. His lips were drawn up over his teeth in a sneering smile. What happened next was almost too quick for Rita's eye to see. At one moment a heavy brass paperweight lay on Quarles' desk; the next moment it had flown across the room and knocked the gun out of the young man's hand.

Quarles moved across the room with an agility surprising in so big a man and picked up gun and paperweight, while the young man cried out with pain and anger.

"This," Rita Foldes said calmly, "is my young brother Charles. He is, like my father, a member of our National Liberation Committee. He speaks loudly but performs little. You owe Mr. Quarles an apology, Charles."

"I am sorry," Charles Foldes said. He added sulkily, "It was not loaded."

Quarles polished the brass paperweight on his sleeve and returned it to the desk. "Sit down. What secrets were you afraid your sister might tell?"

"It is about their ridiculous committee," she said. "Playing at being conspirators."

"It is very well to talk about playing." Charles Foldes almost shouted the words. "For Andreas and Paul there was no play."

"What happened to Andreas and Paul?" Quarles asked.

"They were sent back home as agents, picked up as soon as they arrived. We have a spy in our organization, betraying our best men."

Quarles said softly, "And you think your father might have been this spy? That with his work done he might have gone back. Is that what worries you?"

The young man did not answer. There was silence in the room for a moment, then the telephone rang. Quarles picked it up to hear the clipped, yet slightly languid tones of Mervyn Briffitt.

"Look here, we've found a taximan who took Foldes down to the dock area on the night he disappeared. Says Foldes met someone there. Would you care to come along to my office while I talk to him?"

Quarles said that he would, and told Briffitt that two members of the family were with him.

"Bring them along by all means."

As they went out of the building, Quarles told them the news. "It looks as though your father may have gone back."

Rita Foldes shook her head in an insistent gesture of denial. And at that moment she slipped on the last step

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ınd fell heavily to the ground. When Quarles and her brother ıelped her up, her face was twisted with ɔain. With their help she hobbled to a ɜaxi. "Have you sprained it?" Quarles ısked.

"It is nothing, it will be better soon. 3ut I will not believe that my father ɯent back of his own free will. I will ıever believe it, never, *never*."

This morning Mervyn Briffitt looked ɾosier and more cherubic than usual. He greeted Rita Foldes and her ɔrother warmly. "Glad you could ɔome along. It really does look as though we're on the track of something. Now, here's our taxi driver, Bill Savory. Just repeat that story you were telling me, Bill."

The taxi driver was a gnarled, hard-bitten little Cockney who showed some sign of regret that he had ever become mixed up in this affair. "I ought to get back on the beat, guv. I'm losing fares, see."

"That's all right, my man," Briffitt said in a lordly manner. "I'll see you're not the loser by it."

The taxi driver sighed, rested his hands on his knees, and gabbled away in a singsong voice. "I'm coasting along that Sunday evening just off Holland Road, see, in Belsiter Gardens, and this old gentleman comes out of a house."

"Number forty-four?" Rita Foldes said.

The taxi driver regarded her with a look of patient pity. "I couldn't say, miss, wasn't looking at the numbers."

"But you recognize this photograph?" With a conjuror's quickness Briffitt produced a photograph. Quarles, looking over his shoulder, saw the face of Doctor Foldes, vaguely familiar from newspaper photographs—the face of a European liberal, shrewd, tolerant, patient, a little sad, the hands clasped together in a gesture expressing resignation, the pince-nez adding an almost comic scholarly touch.

"That's the old gentleman, no doubt about it." Briffitt returned the photograph to his pocket. "Asked me to take him down to the East India Docks—near the Royal Victoria it was. So I did. Took him down there, dropped him off, got paid. Then this other chap comes out of the darkness to meet him. And my fare says, 'You are here, then. You are in time.' And that's the lot."

"Now I have already shown you these, but I will show them to you again," Briffitt said. He did another conjuring act, producing a photograph of Jimmy Clayton, then one of his brother Ralph.

"I couldn't say," the driver said wearily. "I told you before, I just couldn't say. Can I go now, guv?"

"One or two more questions. Just repeat, if you will, how the other man was dressed."

"Wore a raincoat with the collar turned up a bit, and a trilby hat. Wasn't short—medium to tall I should say. But it was dark, I tell you, and I wasn't looking all that hard."

"Just one more question, Mr. Savory," Quarles said. "Those words your fare spoke—in what tone were they uttered?"

"I don't get you."

"Did he sound as though he were pleased to see the other man, as though he knew him well, as though he didn't know him at all, as though he might be afraid of the other man? What was your impression?"

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The taxi driver thought, then spoke slowly and deliberately. "I should say it was someone he knew, not much doubt of that. But pleased to see him, no. It was like—you might say it was like a schoolteacher talking to a boy just before giving him a dose of the stick. Can I go now, guv? I got to get back on the job."

When Bill Savory had gone, Briffitt looked at them with some satisfaction. His office was a neat small room high up in a building off Grosvenor Gardens. On the walls were, not the criminal mementos one might have expected, but more modern paintings—this time the young English realists, Middleditch and Jack Smith, and their Italian contemporaries.

Stroking his fair mustache, Briffitt said, "We've traced your father to the docks. I wonder if you'd like to say anything about that."

Brother and sister said nothing.

Quarles asked, "Was there any boat in the dock that night which had come from Foldes' country, or was sailing to it?"

Briffitt shook his head, his eyes bright and merry. "None that had any direct connection at all. Yes, Jane my dear, what is it?"

The dark, pretty girl who had put her head inside the door said, "Will your guests have tea or coffee, Mervyn?"

"Tea, my dear, I'm sure. The Earl Grey, so refreshing, with a slice of lemon." When the door had closed he said, "Lady Jane Milberry—Lord Milberry's daughter, of course. Such a charming girl, and so discreet."

Quarles observed him with an ironical eye.

Rita suddenly spoke. "I shall never believe that my father could have been in any way a traitor. I shall never believe that he could have been fool enough to go back."

"Have you any idea at all why he went down to the docks?"

She shook her head. "None, except that I believe it was some kind of trap. And I do not see what this can have had to do with Jimmy."

"Shut up, Rita." Her brother's dark face was brooding, sulky. The slang sounded odd in his heavily accented voice. "Mr. Quarles, about this I have to think. It is serious."

"You mean you know something?"

Charles Foldes ran his hand through his hair, ruffling it. "No. But I think—I think I must go home now. Excuse me, please." He got up and left them.

A couple of minutes later Lady Jane came in. She poured tea, added lemon, and said to Briffitt, "Here's the lunch edition of the evenings. And a note that's just come by hand."

Briffitt opened the papers, gave a furious exclamation, and passed one over to Quarles. The detective read:

*WHERE IS JIMMY CLAYTON? BRITISH STAR DISAPPEARS AFTER VICTORY*

The story briefly reported the fact of Clayton's disappearance, and told of an unsuccessful attempt to get information from his home. Then came the vital paragraphs.

"Bobo Williams, famous British coach, who laid down the brilliant strategy by which Clayton beat the Russian ace Gladkov, admitted today that he was worried. 'My lips are sealed,' he said. 'I have been ordered to say nothing. But I have not seen

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immy since the match, and am very nxious about him.

" 'He is due to play in the men's oubles today, and in his singles semi-nal against Harry Parker tomorrow. he affair is in the hands of private letective Francis Quarles, but so far ie seems to have done nothing.'

"Mr. Quarles was not in his office vhen I telephoned. His secretary re-used to confirm or deny that he knew nything about Jimmy Clayton's dis-ppearance."

"I never thought it would be possible o keep it quiet," Quarles said. He vas stopped by another exclamation rom Briffitt. The little rosy-faced man, iow almost purple with indignation, anded him the note Lady Jane had rought in. Quarles read:

"To Messrs. Mervyn Briffitt and Francis Quarles—in conference:

"You might as well give up the earch for Foldes. You'll never find im, he's out of your reach. I will try o get Jimmy back in time for his natch—if you don't stick your noses n too far.

"Ralph Clayton."

Briffitt fairly pounded the bell on iis desk. Lady Jane appeared, looking omewhat disapproving. "When did his note come?"

"A minute or two ago. I waited until he tea was ready before I brought it in."

"And who brought it?"

A certain aristocratic detachment, perhaps indicating resentment that she was being talked to like a mere secre-tary, became evident in her manner. "I really couldn't say. One of the boys brought it up. I'll make inquiries if you like."

"I do like. And make them quickly."

The stare which Lady Jane gave him was Medusan in its malignancy. But she was back in less than five minutes, to say that the note had been delivered by a small boy who was eating an ice cream cone.

"The usual thing," Quarles observed. "If you trace him you'll find he was given it by a bigger boy who got it from a man outside a post office, or something like that. Not much hope of tracing the note, either. Typewritten on a fairly new machine, or at least one that has no glaring faults of align-ment. Flimsy paper. You can put people onto it, but it's long odds against them turning up anything in time for it to be useful."

Briffitt agreed. "You realize what this means. You were followed here from your office—perhaps Miss Foldes and her brother were followed before then. You noticed nothing?"

"No. But I wasn't looking for any-one. It would be interesting to know whether our man was following Miss Foldes and her brother—they came to me at different times—or whether he was trailing me."

Briffitt was stroking his silky mus-tache. "He knew you were coming to see me, and he knows my Christian name. Still, it's not surprising that Ralph Clayton should know these things."

"You've not remarked the most in-teresting thing about this note."

"What's that?"

"The fact that it should have been written at all."

Back in his office Quarles patted Molly Player on the shoulder. "You held the fort well against the newspaper onslaught. Thank you."

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She smiled sweetly. "Thank *you*. I was helped by the fact that you forgot to tell me anything about the case. But when Miss Foldes called this morning I remembered that she was the girl who got engaged to Jimmy Clayton a few months ago, and I put one and one together."

"Do you know why I didn't tell you about it?" She shook her head. "Because I knew it would give you so much pleasure to work it out for yourself. Now bring me the Blake-Oster file, will you, and order me a sandwich and a glass of milk."

For the next two hours Quarles worked on the Blake-Oster file, collating reports from three different agents about the activities of a drug syndicate which operated in England through a firm of coffee merchants, half a dozen manicurists in top-class hairdressing establishments, and a traveling circus. This ability to switch himself from one case to another at a moment's notice was one of his more considerable accomplishments.

He had just begun to write his report on the drug syndicate when Molly Player buzzed him on the office telephone. "Mr. Williams ringing from Wimbledon. Do you want to speak to him?"

"Yes, put him on." There was a click, and Charles heard Bobo Williams' thin, protesting voice.

"Mr. Quarles, they've done it. You're too late."

"What do you mean?"

"They've scratched Jimmy from the men's doubles. His name was called, and he wasn't here. Oh, Mr. Quarles, what are we going to do? Is there any news at all?"

"No positive news." He added dryly, "Except of course the news that yc gave to the papers."

An anguished bleat came to hi down the telephone. "But, M Quarles, I really didn't say anything—

"You just told anyone who didn know that I was working on the case, Quarles said pleasantly. "Now, M Williams, I want you to answer question. You know Jimmy Clayto is devoted to his brother, Ralph?"

"But Ralph Clayton is dead."

"Let us suppose for a moment tha he is alive," Quarles said patiently Williams gasped. "This is the question Suppose Jimmy had to choose betwee helping Ralph and playing in th men's singles semifinal, which do yo think he would do?"

Bobo Williams was in many ways foolish man, but his voice now had a impressive earnestness. "Mr. Quarles I don't believe anything—anything at all—would keep Jimmy away from Wimbledon tomorrow if it was humanly possible for him to get there."

When Quarles put down the telephone his face was grave. He cuppec chin in hands for a moment, thinking, then asked Molly Player to ring Mrs. Clayton.

Jimmy's mother was a woman who concealed her emotions as much as possible, but the anxiety in her voice came through the carefully controlled tones that he remembered.

"Yes, Mr. Quarles. Is there any news?"

"Nothing definite, I'm afraid." He then put to her the question that he had put to Bobo Williams, and received an almost equally emphatic reply. "James was mad about tennis. He would let nothing come between him and playing at Wimbledon."

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"Not even the chance of helping alph?"

There was a pause. "Are you trying o tell me that Ralph is still alive, Mr. )uarles?"

"I don't know. That is something m trying to find out."

She said slowly, "Do you know, I lmost hope he isn't. But as for your uestion—I don't think anything but )rce would stop Jimmy from playing t Wimbledon."

When Quarles had put down the eceiver, he said to Molly Player, Who's our best contact at the War )ffice?"

"Colonel Pennefether, I should hink. He was awfully grateful when ou got his wife out of that scrape vith the blackmailer, if you remem- ıer."

"Get him, will you?"

Five minutes later he was talking to Colonel Pennefether, and explaining vhat he wanted.

"Ralph Clayton," Pennefether said houghtfully. "I remember the name, ıaturally. Give me an hour, and I'll ee what I can dig up."

He rang back in less than that time, ıpologetic. "Sorry, old boy, but there's not much hard information. Clayton's name stinks, no doubt about that. He wasn't a double agent, working for us, if that was in your mind. Just one of the weaker brethren, who hadn't got what it takes. As for his death, there's nothing to contradict that Chinese story that he was killed in one of our bombing raids. Equally, nothing that absolutely confirms it. You could call it ninety per cent certain, I should think."

Quarles thanked him. He had hardly put down the receiver when Molly said, "There's Mr. Foldes on the line. He seems very excited."

Charles Foldes came on, the words bubbling out in his imperfect English. "Mr. Quarles, I had to go home because of something—I was suspecting something. And I have discovered it. I know now how to tell you about my father, why he went to the docks. It was—"

There was a sudden crack that seemed almost to split Quarles's eardrum.

Then a cry.

Then silence.

(*continued on page 139*)

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

| | |
|---|---|
| AUTHOR: | **REX STOUT** |
| TITLE: | ***Curtain Line*** |
| TYPE: | Detective Story |
| DETECTIVE: | Alphabet Hicks |
| LOCALE: | New York City |
| TIME: | The Present |
| COMMENTS: | *40,000,000 fans idolized Adam Nicoll in the role of "Kevin Kay," series hero of books, movies, and TV. And when their favorite character was murdered . . .* |

WHEN ALPHABET HICKS GOT home a little before midnight that Thursday evening in October, he found a man waiting for him at the top of the second flight of stairs in the dingy old brick building on East 29th Street.

"Where've you been?" the man demanded, confronting him.

In the dim light from the one little bulb at the end of the narrow hall, Hicks peered at him with yellow-brown cat's eyes. "I don't believe—" he began, and stopped. "Wait a minute. Sure. Sergeant Purley Stebbins, who used to be on Homicide."

"I still am. Let's go in and sit down for a little talk."

"What about?"

"Homicide. Adam Nicoll."

Hicks nodded. "I rather expected one of you, but not a Sergeant. I'm flattered. Also I'm tired and sleepy and if we go in my room I'm stuck with you until you're ready to go but I'm all for sitting down." He moved to the stairs, descended two steps, and sat on the landing. "What's wrong with this?"

Stebbins suggested a couple of things wrong with it, lost the argument, and propped himself against the newel. He was a big, broad bulk, towering above his target. "Where've you been?" he asked.

"Today and tonight, at Democratic campaign headquarters."

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"Doing what?"

"Deciding how to vote. I'm a serious voter. I volunteer for two days' work at Democratic headquarters, and two days at Republican, and then decide. Responsibilities of a citizen."

"Yeah, I know, you're a card. How's the detective work coming?"

"Not coming." Hicks tilted his head back against the plaster to look up at the tower. "Let's get through with me and go on, so I can get to bed. I've never solicited detective work and I never will. The Harley case got me some notoriety, and the Brager thing some more, and a couple of others you know about, and that's all. R. I. Dundee still pays me a hundred dollars a week to think up things for him to worry about in his business, and I spend around ten minutes a day thinking. The rest of the time I look on."

"At what?"

"Life and death." Hicks gestured. "Come on, Sergeant, I'm not worth it. All I have is life, and you've got death on your hands. What do you want to know?"

"How long have you known Paul Griffin?"

"Four years. He came to see me. The publicity I had got had given him the idea I was full of remarkable notions, and he wanted me to hatch plots and stunts for his Kevin Kay. It didn't appeal to me and I turned him down, but he has kept after me and I've seen him off and on—maybe four or five times a year. Does that get us to Tuesday evening?"

"We can go back if we need to. What happened Tuesday?"

"He phoned that afternoon and said he had to see me—that was day before yesterday—and I went up to his apartment on Central Park West. He said he and his associates were in a jam, and lawyers had only made it worse, and they wanted me to meet with them that evening—not the lawyers—and see if I could iron it out. Do I need to tell you what the jam was?"

"We've had it from five angles." Stebbins shifted against the newel. "We want yours."

"I'm tired and sleepy," Hicks objected, "but sooner or later, I guess, so why not sooner? Okay. Griffin first put his Kevin Kay into a couple of novels—that was some twelve years ago—and then movies, and then television. Forty million people think he's a wonderful character, and why should I argue? After Adam Nicoll played the part in eight or nine movies, and on TV for a couple of years, it was another case of Joseph Jefferson and Rip van Winkle, or William Gillette and Sherlock Holmes—you couldn't tell 'em apart, and it was hard to say who it was that had the forty million by the tail. As you know, Sergeant, that's not an angle; it's an open chapter in the history of contemporary American culture."

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"Go ahead."

"Of course another element in the chapter, maybe minor and maybe not, is another character who appears in all the Kevin Kay stories, called the Cricket, and in movies and TV, Amy Quong has become the Cricket just as Adam Nicoll has become Kevin Kay. For the forty million, Amy Quong *is* the Cricket. If you want my angle, one reason I shy off is all the damn K sounds. Not only Kevin Kay, which is more than enough, but the Cricket too. I deplore it."

"Thanks." When Stebbins was sarcastic he growled. "You said you're tired and sleepy."

"I am. Last winter Barry Maddox, the well-known producer, told Griffin he wanted to put a Kevin Kay play on Broadway, and after a lot of palaver Griffin agreed to write one. He finished it in May, and after a series of battles with Maddox about rewrites they were finally ready to start casting in August, two months ago. I can't tell you who it was who first suggested having the part of Kevin Kay played not by Adam Nicoll but by someone else, because I don't know.

"Anyhow, Griffin and Maddox agreed on it, and the someone else was Ernest Levitan, and Levitan read a script and was engaged for the part. However, they couldn't find anyone around to play the Cricket, or maybe they didn't try. Maddox flew to the Coast and proposed it to Amy Quong; she jumped at the chance to appear on Broadway, and last week she came East."

Hicks twisted his wrist around to get the light from the one little bulb on his watch. Ten minutes of tomorrow were already gone. "Rumblings had been heard for some time from Adam Nicoll in Beverly Hills, and Sunday, four days ago, he arrived in New York and phoned Griffin from a hotel. He had his wife along. For several years it has been customary for Nicoll and his wife to put up at Griffin's apartment when they come to New York, and Griffin went to the hotel for them and took them to his place. Then the fur began to fly.

"Nicoll wouldn't stand for Levitan playing Kevin Kay, but he couldn't do it himself, anyhow not this season, because he was scheduled for a Kevin Kay picture to start shooting in December, and also he had his TV contract. Barry Maddox insisted on going ahead with Levitan. Amy Quong wanted to be on Broadway and to hell with everything else. Griffin, who owns the characters and could have Jimmy Durante play Kevin Kay if he wanted to, couldn't tell Nicoll to go climb a tree because of the possible effect on the forty million. That was the jam Griffin told me about Tuesday afternoon."

"And wanted you to iron out."

Hicks nodded. "That evening after dinner."

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"And you went. Who was there?"

"Paul Griffin, Barry Maddox, Ernest Levitan, Amy Quong, and Adam Nicoll and his wife. I didn't think there was much chance of ironing it out, but it would be fun to try, and besides, I wanted to meet Amy Quong. I have always wondered if the Oriental slant of my eyes had any genetic basis, and I wanted to see how I reacted to her."

"What was said? By everybody."

"My God," Hicks protested, "have a heart. I was there nearly two hours."

"Yeah." Stebbins shifted position. "Let's go in and sit down."

"Nothing doing." Hicks was firm. "You'd stay all night."

"I haven't got all night. When and how did you hear of Nicoll's death?"

"Early this afternoon at Democratic campaign headquarters. Someone heard it on the radio."

"Has any of those six people been in touch with you today?"

"No."

"You've heard nothing from any of them, directly or indirectly?"

"Nothing."

Stebbins shifted again. The newel was not an ideal prop for a prolonged stay. "Nicoll was poisoned with cyanide. At nine o'clock this morning he ate breakfast at Griffin's apartment, alone. His wife and Griffin weren't up yet. Orange juice, toast, and coffee. It wasn't in them, as it stands now. Immediately after breakfast he swallowed a large vitamin capsule which he always does. In less than ten minutes he was sick. In five more he was in convulsions. By the time a doctor arrived it was too late to pump him, and at ten o'clock he was dead. So it was in the capsule."

"You can't buy cyanide capsules at a corner drug store."

"No, but you can buy it in a lot of forms for a lot of purposes—for instance, a photographers' supply shop. You make a hole in the end of a vitamin capsule with a needle, squeeze out the paste, insert the needle of a hypodermic syringe loaded with hydrocyanic acid, squirt it in, and heat the end of the needle to seal the hole."

"I don't."

"Somebody must have."

"To one of Adam Nicoll's vitamin capsules?"

"Right."

"I saw them Tuesday evening. His wife asked him if he had remembered to take one after dinner, and he said no, and she went and brought the bottle from the dining room and he took one. The bottle had a blue label and the capsule was dark blue. Ernest Levitan asked to see the bottle and passed it on to Barry Maddox, making some crack about getting some since he was going to do Kevin Kay, which didn't help any with the ironing out. Did the capsule this morning come from that bottle?"

"Yes. It was there on the sideboard in the dining room."

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"Then that should simplify it. Griffin or Mrs. Nicoll could have had a chance to take one and doctor it and put it back, but surely not Maddox or Levitan or Amy."

Stebbins grunted. "No, but one of them could have bought a bottle of the capsules at any drug store, and practiced the operation until he got one that looked right, and then all he had to do was sneak it into the bottle. Maddox and Levitan were there again all yesterday afternoon, and Amy Quong was there yesterday evening. You haven't been there since Tuesday?"

"Nope. Also I have no hypodermic syringe. Not to mention hydrocyanic acid."

"Yeah. We're on the routine on that, but you know how that is." Stebbins shifted his rump again. "We want a full statement from you about Tuesday evening, and you can make it at the D.A.'s office tomorrow morning at ten. Right?"

"Right. So now I'll turn in."

"In a minute. You can tell me now anything that anybody said that might help. Anything at all."

"Let's see." Hicks yawned. "They were all more or less on Nicoll's neck, one way or another. His wife kept insisting that he should do Kevin Kay on Broadway himself, and was a little nasty about it, but that's somewhat personal because women who don't care how much they drink annoy me. I gathered that she doesn't like Hollywood. Nicoll said his lawyer had advised him that he had established a property right in common law in the part of Kevin Kay, and if Maddox went ahead and cast Levitan for it he would throw the book at him including an injunction and a suit for damages. Maddox said he had invested a lot of time and money in the play, and signed up Levitan and the rest of the cast, and contracted for a theater for a December opening, and Nicoll could go choke himself. I suppose Nicoll and Maddox were both somewhat affected by a complication which you probably know about."

Stebbins nodded. "Mrs. Nicoll was formerly Mrs. Maddox. She left him for Nicoll three years ago. Does he still want her back?"

"I don't know."

"Does she want him back?"

"I don't know that either. It didn't come up Tuesday. Paul Griffin said he would have been glad for Nicoll to do Kevin Kay on Broadway if movie and TV commitments hadn't made it impossible. Maddox said he wouldn't. Griffin said he would contract to pay Nicoll the same salary that Levitan would get, during the entire run of the play, and also he would guarantee Maddox against any loss through any kind of action brought by Nicoll, which I thought was damn generous.

"Nicoll accused Levitan of wanting to horn in on the part, not only for Broadway, but also later for the movies and TV. Levitan said, in a

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one meant to leave scars, that that ıadn't been in his mind at all, but ɔf course it might work out that vay, since it was the finest part in he whole entertainment field and ɔeople were already saying that Nicoll was lousing it up and would uin it for good in another year. Amy Quong said—by the way, I re-cted to her normally, a beautiful ittle creature—she said she loved verybody and everybody was won-lerful, and she was sure Adam Ni-oll would quit being mad at her ɔecause she was going to do the Cricket on Broadway with Ernest ɹevitan, and he wouldn't do what ıe had threatened to do, and any-vay she didn't care for money, so he had turned over all that she had aved to her father and mother."

Hicks got upright and, stepping ıp to the landing, was on a level vith Stebbins. "That's the best I an do, Sergeant." He yawned. 'Excuse me. I'll go down in the norning and fill it in. Good night."

Stebbins asked a few more ques-ions, not cordial but not conten-ious, and tramped down the old vooden stairs. Hicks went along he narrow hall to a door, let him-elf in with a key, and was in the oom he had occupied for more han a decade.

Flipping the switch brought light rom a lamp on a table by the far vall and a floor lamp off to one ide next to a big easy chair. With he bed and dresser and book-helves, and a few pictures and an-other chair, the room still looked somehow bare, which was how he liked it. He had hung his topcoat in the closet and started for the bathroom when the phone rang, and he went to the table and got it and said hello.

"That you, Hicks?"

"Right."

"This is Paul Griffin. You've heard about Nicoll?"

"Yes."

"We've had one awful day. Ter-rible. Will you come up here to my place? Now?"

"What for?"

"We want to ask you what to do. You know about things like this and God knows we don't."

"Ask your lawyer."

"We have. To hell with lawyers, all they do is—damn it, we want to talk with you!"

"Who does?"

"All of us! We're all here. Amy Quong suggested it, and Maddox—all of us! We need a man with a head on him to tell us what to do in a mess like this. You'll come?"

"Okay. With my head on."

"Right away?"

"Yes."

Hicks hung up, muttered with feeling, "Of all the nerve," went to the bathroom, came out again, and crossed to the closet for his coat.

Even if you are a professional story teller who, by luck or inspira-tion or both, has created and ex-ploited a pair of gold-mine charac-

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ters like Kevin Kay and the Cricket, you will do better on the West Side of the park if you want an apartment with a living room you can take walks in and a dining room big enough to feed twenty guests. That was why Paul Griffin's address was the big old stone pile on Central Park West.

For a bachelor his tenement on the fifth floor was quite a place. Taking a walk in the living room was not actually practical because of the clutter of chairs, tables, statues on pedestals, couches, cabinets, musnuds, and enormous portraits in oil of Kevin Kay and the Cricket on easels; but it would have been perfect for a steeplechase.

When Alphabet Hicks was led in and through the clutter by Paul Griffin to where the group was gathered around the fireplace, he stood and looked around at them. They were a dismal sight.

Ernest Levitan, sprawled on a couch, might have been cast for a lost soul headed for hell instead of Kevin Kay on Broadway.

Cynthia Nicoll, at the end of the couch with a drink in her hand, her corn-silk hair frowzy and her blue eyes puffy, tried to focus on the newcomer and couldn't make it.

Amy Quong, a dark compact figurine cross-legged on the rug, was staring at the fire and didn't move.

Barry Maddox, the producer, normally big and broad and genial, was a vague, sagging mass propped against a teakwood chair.

Paul Griffin, usually meticulou of manners, collapsed his lank frame onto a chair while his invite guest still stood.

"So," Hicks remarked, "it's bee a hard day."

"Good God," Maddox mutterec "Hard?"

"I think," Levitan said wearily "I've got the record. Eleven hour straight. I've been questioned by fiv detectives and two Assistant Dis trict Attorneys. One of the detec tives was an Inspector. Griffin is th runner-up with four and two. To morrow will be another day."

"It hazh been—" Cynthia Nicol began, stopped, and set her jaw.

"It hazh been what?" Levitan de manded.

She wobbled her head. "W ought to be in bed, resting up fo tomorrow," Levitan said tragically "But Maddox insisted on getting you here. What for? You tell us."

Barry Maddox grasped the top o the chair back and straightened up a little. "Don't mind him, Mr Hicks. He's an actor. We all want ed to consult you, knowing of your past exploits. We are under suspicion of murder, and you know what that means. My lawyer has given me certain advice as to what I tell the police, and he has also advised me to have no contact whatever with any of these four people because one of them is a murderer and I might compromise myself. That's not the way I like to act and I want to know what you think.

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"Also we want to tell you all ıbout it and ask you if you think he police are justified in limiting heir suspicion to us. Why couldn't t have been someone else? Why ouldn't the poisoned capsule have ıeen put in the bottle a week ago, ıut West? Why couldn't Nicoll have :illed himself, and did it that way o throw suspicion on someone? Zou didn't get us out of our jam Tuesday evening, God knows you lidn't, but you impressed us."

Amy Quong had pivoted on the ug to give Hicks her black eyes. "You impressed me here," she ıissed, placing the fingertips of ıoth hands delicately between the amous little breasts of the Cricket. "Won't you sit? Near me where I an feel you?" She patted a mus-ıud beside her. "Here?"

As Hicks went and lowered him-elf onto the big fat cushion, Paul Griffin spoke. "It's worse than a am now," he said. "It's a calamity. What the devil do we do, just wait ıntil they clamp onto one of us? Damn it, we can't! I know I can't! Of course you probably don't know —ask us anything you want to."

"Don't ask me!" Cynthia Nicoll ılurted, and put her glass down.

Hicks felt something on his knee ınd looked down to see Amy Quong's lovely little dark hand esting there. He sent his eyes ıround. "As for telling you what to lo," he said, "that's a big order and can't fill it. I was rather expecting ou to ask me who killed Adam Nicoll, but that's not it?"

"We couldn't ask you to pass a miracle, could we?" Levitan asked.

"No, I suppose not, but it's a pity that's not what you want, because I already know who killed Nicoll."

They goggled at him.

Ernest Levitan sat up. Amy Quong's fingers on his knee closed into a fist. Barry Maddox said, "That's a good line, Hicks. You ought to use it in a play, end of the second act. See the audience reaction?"

Hicks shook his head. "It's not a line, it's a fact, only I exaggerated a little. I should have said I'm pretty sure I know—say, ten-to-one sure. Get the same effect. Right now one of you is having a hard time with his face, and also inside his skull. Am I bluffing or have I really got something? Wouldn't he—or she, since I mustn't slight the ladies—like to know?"

"We all would." Maddox had released his hold on the back of the chair and quit sagging. "Suppose you tell us."

"It's a good gag," Levitan said, but not wearily.

"Not a gag," Hicks declared. "When I was here Tuesday evening one of you said something that struck me as pretty remarkable, but I skipped it. People do say remarkable things. Today at lunchtime—yesterday now—when someone told me the radio had said that Adam Nicoll had died suddenly and the police were investigating, I

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wasn't reminded of it because I didn't know enough. But when I got home a couple of hours ago, a Homicide detective was there waiting for me, and he told me the details, and naturally I remembered.

"Among other things he asked me to tell him anything that was said here Tuesday evening that might help him, and I did so, including the remarkable item I have mentioned. If he spotted it he gave no sign. I'm to go down to the District Attorney's office in the morning and make a full statement, and of course that item will be in it, and no doubt sooner or later *someone* will notice it and come to the same conclusion I did—that the one who said that remarkable thing killed Adam Nicoll. If they miss it I might even call their attention to it, but I wanted to chew on it first. Right after the detective left, the phone call came from here, and I chewed on it coming uptown, and decided I might as well spring it."

"I never said a remarkable thing in my life," Levitan asserted.

They looked at him, and then at one another, in tense collective vigilance. "Who said what?" Paul Griffin asked quietly.

Hicks, not wanting the distraction of the soft touch of Amy Quong's little hand, lifted his knee and clasped his fingers on it. "First," he said, "I ought to check a little. After all, a ten-to-one shot is not always a shoo-in, and I could be wrong. For all I know, one or more of you may be already ahea of me. Of course I saw the bottle o capsules here Tuesday evenin when the rest of you did, and Nicol took one. Afterward, as I remembe it, Levitan asked to see it and Ni coll handed it to him. Levitan tool a look at it and handed it to Mad dox, who also gave it a look anc then handed it to Mrs. Nicoll, anc she put it down on that little table.' Hicks pointed. "It was there wher I left. Then what happened to it? Of course you've been over all thi with the police."

"We certainly have," Griffin saic with feeling. "It was there on the table when Levitan and Maddox and Amy left and Adam and Cynthia and I went to bed. When the maid cleaned up in the morning she took it to the dining room and put it on the sideboard. Adam was alone at breakfast, but the maid saw him take a capsule from the bottle and leave the bottle on the sideboard, and as far as anybody knows it was on the sideboard all day Wednesday. After dinner Wednesday, before we came in here for coffee, Adam himself went to the sideboard and got out a capsule, and presumably the bottle was on the sideboard throughout Wednesday night. Next morning after breakfast Adam took another capsule, and that—was the one."

"And Maddox and Levitan were here all Wednesday afternoon, and Miss Quong that evening. Right?"

"I wasn't in the dining room,"

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Amy Quong declared in her high, thin voice that always had a suggestion of a tinkle.

Hicks nodded. "I know how that is. But you can prove a negative only by proving a positive, and I don't need that. I do need to know whether the police have got a real pointer. That Maddox or Levitan went alone into the dining room for something Wednesday afternoon wouldn't be enough. If one of them was seen with the bottle in his hand I might want to chew some more. If he was seen unscrewing the cap and putting something in, I'll go home and leave it to the law. Is there anything like that?"

"Not on me," Maddox snapped. "I never saw the damn bottle after Tuesday evening."

"Nor me." Levitan was not cocky. "I was in the dining room, certainly. We had lunch there."

Hicks got up and stood with his back to the fire, his hands in his jacket pockets. "Then I'll give it a try. I want you to know that I wouldn't be doing this if I hadn't been asked to come up here. I thought it was nervy to ask me, but maybe not. Who suggested it?"

"I did," Barry Maddox said. "And I think you've done enough stalling."

"Did anyone oppose it?"

"I don't think so. No."

"Even so, it may not have been nerve, merely discretion. I'm not stalling, Mr. Maddox. I'm just making it a little harder for a murderer to hang on after the hard day he's had. I can't indict him, since I have no evidence, but I know him and think I can crack him. If I have this right, and I think I have, it's a strange business. In a way, a man has died by his own hand. In a way, it wasn't Adam Nicoll that was murdered, it was Kevin Kay. Kevin Kay was murdered because there had to be a death before there could be a resurrection. I admit—"

"Skip the goddam riddles!" It was Ernest Levitan, not acting. "If you've got no evidence, what have you got?"

"I'm telling you." Hicks's voice sharpened. "I admit I have an advantage on the police, since I was told of the plans for the resurrection long before the death was plotted, and possibly before it was contemplated." His eyes went to Griffin. "You remember, Paul, telling me of the projected play? And later that Levitan would do Kevin Kay in it?"

"Of course." Griffin was undisturbed. "I told several people."

"No doubt. And some of them may have thought as I did. What I thought was that you had been driven to desperation. You had finally found it intolerable that a mere movie actor had usurped the glory and acclaim rightfully due to the creature of your own brain, your Kevin Kay. To millions of people Adam Nicoll was Kevin Kay, the two were indistinguishable, and since for years you had

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identified yourself with Kevin Kay, that was insufferable. You were in an agony of resentment and rancor. You did your best to conceal it, and it may even be that I was the only one who noted the glint in your eye and the strain in your voice when you spoke Nicoll's name, though I doubt it. You never put it into words. At your trial for the murder of Adam Nicoll, I doubt if a single witness can be produced who will say that he ever heard you speak spitefully of Nicoll."

"For God's sake." Griffin snorted. "Me on trial? *Me?*"

"You're already on trial, and you know it. So when Maddox asked you to put Kevin Kay in a play you saw your chance. By putting another actor in the part, the hold of Nicoll on the public mind and heart as the one and only Kevin Kay would be loosened and eventually broken. Two Kevin Kays would be too much for idolatry, and it would all come back to the true Kevin Kay, you. This is not a mere surmise; no other motive could have impelled you to let Maddox put another actor in the part. You knew it would infuriate Nicoll. You didn't do it for money, because you wouldn't get it anyway; you were already above the eighty-per-cent income tax bracket. I know you said you wanted Kevin Kay on Broadway, but that wasn't good enough—at least, not for me.

"That's a good idea—clasp your hands to keep them from trembling. But remembering how you felt about Nicoll, you can't keep from trembling inside. You're going to crack, Paul, you're bound to crack. That may sound brutal, but it isn't. I'm deliberately trying to break you down because it will save you harder days than today. If you tell us now where you got the syringe and the poison and the capsules to practice with, it will soon be over. If you don't, if you try to hold on, it may take the police weeks to find out, months even, but sooner or later they'll get it. Do you want to live through those weeks and months?"

"Good God," Levitan whispered, and asked aloud, "Do you have to? Look at him!"

Amy Quong, on her feet, went to Griffin and put her hand on his shoulder. The Cricket would have done that.

"Go on," Griffin told Hicks in a thin, tight voice. "What did I say Tuesday evening?"

"Not much, but enough for the purpose. In a moment. All that about putting Levitan in the play, it was nothing in my soup. I wished you luck, but I wasn't surprised when you phoned Tuesday and told me Nicoll had come to New York and fur was flying. After an hour here that evening it looked to me as if you were cornered. If you dropped the play your whole plan was sunk, and if you didn't, Nicoll was obviously going to raise a stink that might tie up Kevin Kay for

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years. When you said you would pay Nicoll the same salary that Levitan would get for the run of the play, and that you would guarantee Maddox against any loss that might result through any action brought by Nicoll, I thought you were cuckoo. It might ruin you and Kevin Kay both, and I couldn't see how you were figuring it. I didn't ask you, because the others were here, and by that time I had about concluded you were no longer capable of figuring."

Hicks stepped two paces away from the fire at his back, which took him closer to Griffin. "But when I heard from Sergeant Stebbins tonight how Nicoll had died, I realized that you had figured plenty. If Nicoll was going to die in a day or a week—exactly when didn't matter—your offer to pay him and guarantee Maddox *risked nothing* and *would cost you nothing,* even if it had been drafted by lawyers and signed.

"So it looked to me as if you knew Tuesday evening *that Nicoll was going to die.*

"I said before it was a ten-to-one shot, but now, looking at you, it's a thousand to one. Your two big mistakes were making that offer when I was present to hear it, and just dropping the capsule in the bottle. With the bottle right here in your dining room, you must have had ample opportunity to shake out some of the capsules, put yours in, and return the others. Then Nicoll would have died days later, probably after he had returned to the Coast, and that would have been different. Now it's this way. Now you understand what I meant, Paul, when I said that Kevin Kay was murdered by his own hand."

Griffin nodded. "Yes," he said clearly. "I understand."

"And you see how it is. There's not a glimmer of a chance. Are you going to hang on until they get enough to lock you up?"

"No. I might if I thought I could get you to drop it and if these people hadn't heard it. No." Griffin left his chair and was upright, straight, tall, and lanky. He looked around at them. "It's all over, my friends. Amy, you little devil. Cynthia, you poor neurotic souse. Barry and Ernest, you lucky slobs, this will make the play, it will run forever. All right, Hicks, what?"

"You can tell me things. Or I can take you downtown in a taxi. Or I can phone and they'll come."

"Just a moment." He turned and grasped the arms of the chair he had occupied, a chair so big and heavy that it took a man to lift it and raise it above his head, which he did. With it aloft, he went across to the easel which held the life-size oil of Kevin Kay, and hurled the chair straight at its middle. The chair went right on through, making tatters of the canvas, and the easel toppled and crashed to the floor.

Griffin turned and told Hicks, "All right, phone."

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **FLORENCE V. MAYBERRY**

TITLE: ***Out of the Dream Stumbling***

TYPE: Crime and Detection

LOCALE: San Francisco

TIME: The Present—and the Past

COMMENTS: *One of the oddest stories we've published in a long time—a strange story that will get under your skin, skewer into your consciousness—and perhaps into your subconscious . . .*

THE MAN ON THE WITNESS STAND LOOKED YOUNGER THAN HE WAS. *Thirty-four, the papers said. In spite of the strain he was under, he had an unused look. Not innocent. The facts of the case made that apparent, and they were underscored by the too-soft set of his mouth. He just looked, simply, unused. The sob sisters were playing him up as a struggling artist, Bohemian, tempted, all that sort of thing. But as for tempting, some people tempt with a crook of the finger.*

*He was frightened. He kept staring at his sister, who sat in the courtroom with her head down. The way he stared added to his unused look—the way a child looks at its mother, helpless and beseeching. Hurt, too, as though he couldn't believe anyone could punish him.*

*The sister was from a different cut of cloth. A thin, pale woman with use all over her. Not ugly. Good features, if the observer went beyond the strain on her face. She was obviously anguished by her brother's trouble. Several of the newspaper stories had featured her—how she had worked so many years to help her brother become an artist, how she refused to believe he could murder anyone, in spite of the evidence. All the broken, strained, understated words by which she tried to tell how much she loved h m . . .*

*Many a person in the courtroom was wrenched by pity because of the sister. It gave the case a deeper perspective.*



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*"Call my sister again, please call Lulie back!" the man on the witness stand cried out, as the prosecuting attorney continued to question him.*

*An embarrassed hush fell over the courtroom . . .*

If they call me up there again, I'll break down, I know I will. I wish I could just stay out of the courtroom until—poor Jack, he sounds just as he did when he was three years old and fell down the stairs and cut his chin and wouldn't let anyone but me touch him. I can't believe we've grown up, and that this has happened to us.

If I didn't have to listen to all these questions! I think I know what happened, but with all these questions and the answers they think they ought to hear, what really happened becomes a secret that keeps running and hiding. When it hides, I have to search and search. And is it the truth when I find it? I don't know any more.

Like my dream last night. About the crystal house.

There, I won't listen to them. I'll just think about my dream, and Celia's crystal house. Maybe it will keep me thinking straight. Because the secret is there. I knew it all over again, the truth, when I went out of the dream house stumbling . . .

I went to the house that was built of crystal. No glass—Celia Hartman's house would never be built of common glass. I touched its door to enter. In the way of dreams the door swung back and the floor itself seemed to move, although I felt no movement, and without walking a step I was inside the house. I was looking for Celia.

Instead of wallpaper on the great entrance hall there were golden designs imbedded in the crystal walls. There were no lighting fixtures. A glow was in the ceiling and I wished I could see how it worked—it was so fabulous, so rich. Like Celia. Eighty millions, Jack said she had. Or maybe it was one hundred and eighty millions—a hundred millions from her family and eighty millions from her former husband. It doesn't matter. It was so much that it was shocking.

But the crystal house and its feeling of infinite luxury didn't shock me. Somehow I expected it to be this way. Anything less would have been a disappointment.

I wondered where the butler was. Because, by this time, everyone knows that Celia Hartman has a butler.

The instant I wondered, there he was, strutting toward me from a gold-fretted archway.

"Where's Celia?" I asked.

"Who knows?" he said. "She's probably hiding. And you haven't a key, so you can't hunt for her."

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"My brother has a key," I said. "One key is quite enough for one family. And Celia must be here."

"In that case," he said, and turned and strutted ahead of me. He led me into a room, not quite as large as the auditorium of the San Francisco Opera House.

"Is this the living room?" I asked.

"Drawing room," he corrected primly. "It will be handy for your brother to paint in. Look at the beautiful divans. They've been freshly upholstered."

When I saw the divans, my throat swelled in the way it's been behaving lately. Nerves, the doctor says. I suppose he's right, but sometimes I can hardly breathe; it might as well be real instead of nerves. And for all its vastness this room was crowding, squeezing, choking me with its fat, stuffy divans.

"They're hideous," I said. "I can't imagine anyone with as much money as Celia putting towels on her furniture."

"Not towels," he said superciliously. "Toweling. Special hand-woven, deep-piled toweling. Clean and efficient. Look," he said, leading me to an immense table beside the crystal wall. It, too, was covered with toweling. "If one spills paint or blood or what have you," and he knocked over a vase with roses in it, "it sops up. Very handy, as you see."

I began to think that surely I was wrong in my taste, for Celia wasn't crazy—at least where physical things were concerned. The quick way she took Jack away from Gigi proved that. She knew the ultimates of clothes and jewels and cars and yachts and men, and, I suppose, houses. If she upholstered her furniture in toweling, it must be right.

"Perhaps it's fur," I suggested.

"Fur is for poor people," the butler said. "This was woven from Miss Celia's own design in Miss Celia's own mills."

My throat tightened over that queer lump again . . .

I remembered the only fur coat our family ever had. It was ten years ago, right after Jack and Gigi were married. Jack had sold a painting to a bar on Mission Street. I was upset because he sold it to such a vulgar place—spittoons, beer smell, and a juke box blaring. Especially when the painting was so sparkling, clean-lined, one I especially loved of San Francisco on a clear, sunshiny morning. Jack had it priced at $500. I had insisted that he put high prices on his paintings, even his first ones, because people take a second look when things cost a lot.

Then, when I found out Jack had sold it to the bar for $75, I was furious. I told him to take the money back and ask for his painting. But Gigi was so happy that he had actually sold one, he wouldn't do it.

Jack and Gigi should have used the money to pay the studio rent; I

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told them they ought to. I was afraid I wouldn't have enough money for everything. There was a big bill at the art supply store and the bill for clothes I'd bought for Jack so that he would look impressive when he called at the galleries—I had all those to pay.

But Gigi was only nineteen and so beautiful. And she was always threatening to go to Hollywood to earn the money they continually needed. So Jack bought her a fur coat, to prove he could give her what she wanted. Jack loved her. He really loved her very much. I don't think he ever loved Celia the same way.

They went to Market Street to a cut-rate store and paid $71.45, including tax, for a genuine seal-dyed Dymka. I never heard of such a thing before. I asked about it at my office—and they should know about such things there, it being the office of the biggest department store in San Francisco. The girls laughed like crazy and started playing around with the letters and came up with "d — m yak."

When I first saw the fur coat, with Gigi parading around their studio with the black fur clutched tight to her flat tummy and slim hips, it frightened me. It looked so expensive that I thought here would be one more bill for me to pay. When she took it off, it changed. Dymka was either rabbit-piled mouse, or mouse-sheared rabbit. Or yak. Still, on a person, even on me, it looked rich. I'm not as young as Gigi. And nobody was ever as beautiful as Gigi. But I am slim and tall, and all those years of ballet gave me a grace I'll never lose. After I got Gigi the job modeling at the store and she bought a camel's-hair coat, I could have used the Dymka. But she said she never thought I'd want her discards, so she gave it to a thrift shop.

When their studio rent came due, right after Jack bought the coat, I had to lend them $50. I always keep a hundred dollars or so ahead in the bank for Jack. He's my baby brother and I feel responsible for him. When we were children, I told him we would be famous together, rich and famous. I was studying ballet, and good at it. And after Jack began to copy cartoons out of the funny papers when he was only six, I knew he should be an artist. I planned it all for us.

But the doctor had to find that murmur in my heart. I'd rather he had let me die. Because he said I had to stop dancing. Mama was just sick about it; she was always sure I was the genius of the family. But after Mama died—well, anyway, there was the murmur. Besides, it takes two people to be a genius, one to push and one to do. The way things turned out, Mama was wrong. Jack was the genius . . .

"My sister-in-law had a fur coat," I told the butler. "She didn't look poor in it. She looked like a million dollars."

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"We've got a million dollars in our refrigerator," said the butler, his nasty little face twisting all over itself. "Miss Celia keeps it on hand to serve with cocktails. That's what she intends to serve at Mr. Jack's exhibition."

"I want to see it," I said. "All my life I've wanted to see a million dollars."

"This way, madam," said the butler, drawing himself up, sticking out his stomach, making me notice for the first time that he was wearing red and white striped velvet pajamas. "They're liveried pajamas," he explained, smirking.

We walked—slowly and heavily, like wading through water—into the kitchen. There was the refrigerator, all done up in toweling too.

That idiot butler hopped into the kitchen sink, pajamas and all, and turned on the water. "Hand me the towel off the icebox," he said.

"Don't be such a fool," I said. "All the stories I've read about butlers, they didn't act like you. I've changed my mind, I don't want to see Celia's money, I want to see Celia. Where's she hiding?"

"She's in the courtroom," he said.

"Nonsense," I said. "If I know Celia, she'll be in the bedroom."

But I don't think it was I who said that. It was my voice, but I think Gigi said it . . . She could never quit dwelling on the time she found Celia in Jack's and her bedroom. Like a wildcat, she was.

Gigi was supposed to be at work. It was busy at the store—they were getting ready for a fashion tea. And it was stupid of me—I shouldn't have mentioned, while Gigi and I were eating lunch together, that Celia was coming to the studio that afternoon to talk over the one-man show Celia was sponsoring for Jack. In the middle of the afternoon Gigi told her boss she was getting appendicitis or something, and went home. It was a horrible mess. Gigi slapped Celia and kicked her as she ran downstairs. Celia had a bad fall. I was thankful she was so rich, else she might have sued.

Every time Jack came near Gigi, she scratched his face. Fighting was in her blood. She was beautiful and a good enough girl, but quite common on occasion. Malloy was her name before she married Jack.

The minute Jack called me, I rushed right from the office to their studio. "Georgiana Grace!" I scolded, using her real name instead of the pet name Jack liked. "Do you realize you may ruin Jack's chance to have this big exhibit? Celia's going to bring important critics. Maybe Jack will get a picture story in *Life*—Celia knows one of the editors. You know very well Jack's paintings are hanging all over this apartment, even in the bathroom. Would you spoil his career just because he showed his sponsor the paintings in the bedroom?"

Gigi said a filthy word. "Grow up!" she said. "Jack's too big to dress in doll clothes any more."

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"Jack, will you give me your word that everything between you and Celia was—proper?" I asked. Jack never lied to me. When he was small and used to work coins out of my piggy bank, he would always admit it.

"Everything was proper," Jack said.

"I'll bet!" Gigi yelled, and scratched him again.

The madder she got, the more Jack tried to hold her and kiss her. At last she let him. When I went into their kitchen to start dinner, he was holding her on his lap explaining how it would be foolish to give up the exhibition when it would all be over in another week or so. "Then I'll buy you another Dymka, baby!" he laughed. But not a word about the hundreds and hundreds of dollars that—oh, well . . .

Watching the butler splash himself and his velvet pajamas in the sink made me suddenly frantic to be clean and cool. I was drenched with perspiration. I was stifled by this house.

I tiptoed out and entered what seemed to be the dining room, with chairs arranged around a long rectangle. But the rectangle was not a table. It was a huge painting, a portrait of Jack, one I had never seen. He was dressed in evening clothes, and carried two cats by their tails. The cats had women's faces. One was mine, the other was Gigi's. Her face looked lovely and right, on the cat's body. Her long, slanted blue eyes—Jack always called them the eyes of a Celtic nymph—were feline, wonderfully exotic.

Beyond this room was a long hall. At the end of it, through a broad doorway, I saw the golden posts of what I thought must be a bed. "Celia!" I called. A bathroom would be off her bedroom. And I was driven by the need to bathe myself.

My cry couldn't be heard, even by me. All the hall was padded with the soft, thick toweling. Every sound was absorbed. The soundless cry backed up in me. It created a rhythm, a bottled frenzy; it made my blood beat, beat, until it was like music. I began to dance, the way I used to. My head bent, my neck curved like Pavlova's in the pictures Mama collected for me.

Suddenly I knew why I was hunting Celia. I was going to ask her to sponsor me in a dance exhibition.

I went dancing down the long, muffled hall. Bending, leaping with a lightness I should have lost years ago. It would astonish Celia, with her superior veiled look. She'd not look at me now the way she did at that cocktail party she gave for Jack, wondering what part of me could possibly be like Jack.

I danced into the room with the golden bedposts. But there was no bed attached to the posts. They were slender, golden columns that spiraled so high they held up the blue sky. No, it wasn't the sky. Only a blue ceiling. In the blue ceiling were star shapes, outlined with tubed light. It was hideously ugly, because it was dead. It was a dead sky.

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The golden posts formed a high, open circle. Celia stood within the circle. Her big dark eyes were lowered so I could not see the golden flecks in them that always reminded me of how rich she was. So I wasn't frightened of her any more.

It was wonderful not to be frightened of a rich person. Always before I had been frightened by her rich house and her rich thinking and her rich manners—even by the rich way she was put together, her round golden flesh, her lips like little red-satin cushions, her poured-honey hair, the golden flecks, all the smooth butter luxury of her.

"You're not as beautiful as Gigi," I told her confidently. "Gigi is a Celtic nymph. She's Irish, you know."

She still didn't look at me. "Yes, I know," she said. "Jack told me."

"I was always a nervous child," I explained. "If I had not been so nervous, I would have been as beautiful as Gigi and you."

"Not as Gigi," she said. "Gigi is a Celtic nymph."

"I'm tired of hearing that," I said. "Do you have a bathtub in your bedroom?"

"This is not a bedroom," she said. "This is the courtroom. I am standing in the middle of the court. Isn't it lovely the way I was able to buy heaven for its ceiling?"

She lifted her eyes, but so high that I couldn't see into them. She clasped her hands under her chin and gazed at the blue ceiling.

"Don't try to look saintly," I warned. "I know as much about your kind as Gigi does. I just pretended I didn't so I wouldn't hurt Jack's career. It's my career too, you know."

She smiled. She really looked quite kind. "Ever get fooled?" she asked softly.

My body burned, but at the same time I was cold with perspiration. The lump in my throat hurt. I began to cry. "I must have a bath, I'm filthy, and there's no tub here."

Celia moved beside me, her eyes once more directed toward the floor. I think she pressed a button on one of the golden posts—I was too disturbed to see. For the floor of the circular court slowly slipped aside, revealing a large pool of water with steps leading into it.

I walked slowly down the steps to the water's edge.

"But the water's dirty! It's full of old dead leaves," I said, weeping again.

"You've let it get stagnant," Celia sneered. "You should have drained it long ago."

What a terrible woman! Blaming me for her own dirty pool of water! I hated her terribly. I hated her with all the hate I had ever had for anyone throughout my life.

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I turned, whirling, leaping up the steps, a nymph doing arabesques of ury.

Celia began laughing, raising her eyes toward me.

"Don't look at me!" I warned. "If you look at me, I'll kill you!"

But she was already looking. Staring, staring.

There was a towel in my hand—I must have picked it up somewhere in he house.

She waved her hand at me, as though in farewell, and turned her back. Then she lay on the floor and went to sleep.

Slowly, as though walking through water, I went to her, eased the towel beneath her cheek. Then I knotted it tightly over her face. She made no truggle. She was already sound asleep.

I left her and ran away. The house compressed, the way things do in lreams, and I was running out the door, stumbling, running again, the secret 10 longer hiding but pursuing me . . .

*"Your sister's testimony was clear," said the prosecuting attorney to the defendant. "There is no need to call her back. Now, is it not true that you entered he bedroom where the deceased was sleeping, asphyxiated her with a chloroform-aturated towel, and—"*

*The defendant began to cry. "I wasn't there when she died!" he said wildly. 'I was at Celia Hartman's house. Only she wasn't home. I had a key—that's vhy the butler didn't know I was there. But he thought he heard a voice calling n the hall—he testified to that."*

*"He thought," the prosecuting attorney emphasized sarcastically. "And a voice so unclear to him that it could be either male or female. The butler had been sound asleep—he had retired early under bromides because of a heavy cold. He believes he may have been having a nightmare. But he arose at once, put on his bathrobe, and examined the upper hall and the lower. No one was there."*

*"My sister sent me there! She sent me, but she won't tell you!" the defendant aid. He stood up and faced his sister. "Lulie, in the name of God, tell them!"*

*"Order!" demanded the judge, pounding his gavel . . .*

I never intended to have Jack blamed. That just happened. One thing built on another, and after it did, I began to think that Jack ought to suffer little. A person needs to suffer to learn how to take care of himself. And fter this Jack will have to take care of himself.

First, the police came. Jack had called them. I was across the street with ld Mrs. Bellingham—she reminds me so much of Mama. And she isn't ight any more—she didn't know when I came in, she can't remember five ninutes at a time. But even though Jack had called the police, and swore he

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was innocent, his fingerprints were all over the chloroform bottle. And thei were the bruises on her shoulders where he'd held her to keep her fro scratching out his eyes.

They were sure he did it. And I kept thinking: suffering toughens person, and Jack needs toughening. Just for a little while. So I told them wasn't there, that I didn't know anything.

After all, he intended to do it. That night, when I saw him fumbling i my medicine cabinet, I felt uneasy. He's always borrowing things. Bu that night he had a queer, white look around his mouth. Earlier I'd hear them fighting, too, that's when she got the bruises. But he told me she wa asleep and he needed antiseptic for a scratch. As for her falling asleep righ after a fight, that was natural. She was a beautiful animal, and a good figh relaxed her.

He was gone a half hour or so. Then he came tearing back. "For God' sake, wake her up! Get a doctor!" he said. "I think she's dead. Lulie, didn't mean it. But she swore she'd stop my exhibit, swore she'd kill Celia—"

I ran next door to their apartment. The nasty smell of chloroform hit me I knew then what he had borrowed from my medicine cabinet. It was th chloroform I'd bought for my kitten when it had fits.

A towel hung from the bed beside Gigi. The chloroform smell came fron it. I examined Gigi. "You're always losing your head," I told Jack. "She' not dead. She's breathing and her heart's beating. You know how soundly she sleeps. But you idiot! How could this help us?"

"I don't know—I didn't want to lose the show—I don't know," he kep saying.

"Get out of here," I said. "Go see Celia. Stay there a while. But don't tell anyone, you hear?—about what you tried to do. I may have to call a doctor and I don't want you around here talking too much. Remember keep your mouth shut."

He ran out.

I put cold water on Gigi's face. I blew my breath into her mouth. It wa useless. Before I began, I knew it. There had been no breath, no heartbeat when I examined Gigi. She was dead before I ever got to their apartment.

And already I knew what I had to do. I don't have a career, and Jack does. Besides, I want to take care of him—it's my life! What else have I got?

I fixed it so that Jack would believe I was the one who really murdered her. That way, he could go on living and working; he wouldn't have to hate himself so much. I picked up the towel, put it on her face, and poured the rest of the chloroform on it. My fingerprints were on the bottle, too. That was only natural. It was my chloroform.

Jack came back, found the towel on her face, and called the police. But

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hen they questioned him, he just kept saying, "Talk to my sister, talk to ıy sister." He didn't know how to handle it. For what could he say that ouldn't make him guilty, too?

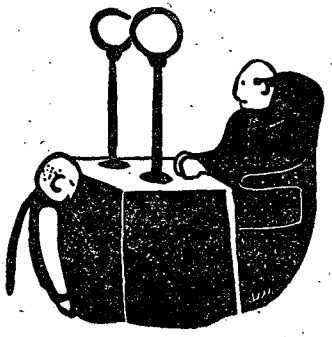
The police found me across the street with that dear old soul, Mrs. ellingham. She kept muttering how I'd been there since I came home om work. I had run in to see her for a minute when I first came home, and ıe didn't remember I'd ever left. By then, with all those policemen and eporters around, I was almost numb. I didn't say anything. I let them talk nd I just nodded. It was so clear they thought Jack had killed her. Well, was scared, and I kept thinking I hadn't really done it. And Jack needed ɔme sense scared into him. So I let it ride.

In those crazy dreams I always start to kill Celia. Then, like the girl be-ıde the pool in the crystal house, when her eyes looked directly at me they ave no golden flecks. They weren't dark. They are Gigi's blue, slanted yes.

I'll sit here, quiet, free, for just another minute or two. Then I'll tell hem. I'll tell them I did it.

*Everyone in the courtroom gazed at her as Lulie abruptly arose from her seat. 'Please! Please!" she cried. "Let him alone! He didn't do it, I did it! But it vasn't Gigi, it was the butler. I killed. He wouldn't take me to Celia. He was itting in the kitchen sink, and I held his head under the faucet until he drowned!"*

*The judge pounded his desk with his gavel. "Bailiff," he ordered. "Remove hat poor woman from the court!"*



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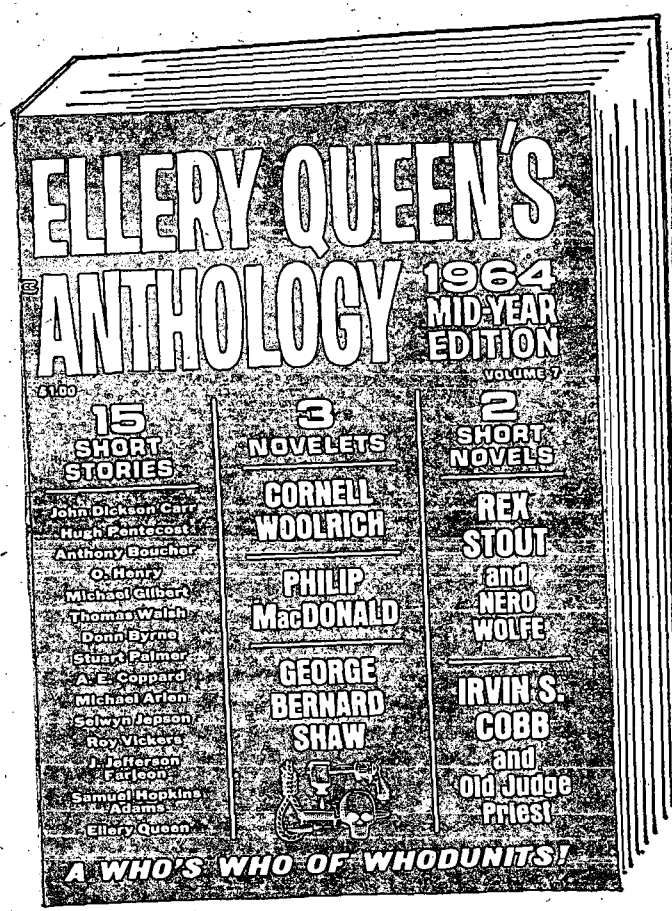


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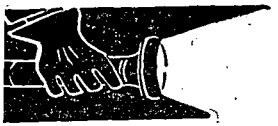

# BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

## ecommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

nce in a rare while even the most opinionated of reviewers must encounter book that leaves him temporarily speechless with puzzlement. It will robably take me a number of months and at least one rereading to decide hether AND ON THE EIGHTH DAY (Random, $3.95) is a daringly brilliant ew departure in the canon of Ellery Queen, or an unfortunate error in udgment and taste. At least in the meantime I can assure you: you have ever read a mystery novel even faintly resembling this—which is reason nough to urge you to read it.

★★★★ **THE NIGHT OF THE GENERALS, *by Hans Hellmut Kirst, translated by J. Maxwell Brownjohn*** (Harper & Row, $4.95)

A formal detective story, a historical novel of World War 2, a atiric study of the German officer class and the German people—superb n every level and admirably translated. A new major classic of crime.

★★★★ **GREENMASK!, *by Elizabeth Linington*** (Harper & Row, $3.95)

Amazingly successful blend of the modern realistic police novel vith one of the great artificial plot-forms of the 1930's—a mystery reader's nystery novel.

★★★★ **DAY OF THE ARROW, *by Philip Loraine*** (Mill-Morrow, $3.50)

Subtly compelling terror in an ancient French castle—a fine mas-culine version of the now usually feminine Gothic romance.

★★★ **FAMOUS TRIALS, EIGHTH SERIES, *edited by James H. Hodge*** (Penguin C2041, 85c)

5 essays (4 of them excellent) from Notable British Trials.

★★★ **THE TRANSCENDENTAL MURDER, *by Jane Langton*** (Harper & Row, $3.95)

Debutant Langton is weak on plot, but wonderfully strong on evoking the atmosphere (present and historical) of Concord, Mass.

Favorite sleuths in solid 3-star performances: Captain José Da Silva in Robert L. Fish's THE SHRUNKEN HEAD (Simon & Schuster, $3.50), Scott Jordan in Harold Q. Masur's MAKE A KILLING (Random, $3.95), and Supt. West in John Creasey's Gideonesque POLICEMAN'S DREAD (Scribner's, $2.95).



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*A satire and spoof on the scholarly ratiocination with which nimble wits all over the world have for more than a century kindled and kept ablaze the Great Shakespeare Controversy . . . written especially for the issue of EQMM on sale in April 1964.*

# THE GREAT SHAKESPEARE MYSTERY

*by J. F. PEIRCE*

SINCE APRIL 1964 MARKS THE QUADRICENTENNIAL OF WILLIAM SHAKspeare's birth, I feel that it is time, once and for all, to solve the Greai Shakespeare Mystery and to set the record straight as to who wrote th so-called Works of Shakespeare.

Some years ago I read an article, by a scholar whose name I have sinc happily forgotten, in which it was asserted that Homer's *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, an *Homeric Hymns* were written, not by Homer, but by nine other writers—all named Homer.

Recently, I was reminded of this fascinating bit of scholarship, and it se me thinking.

Since the works of Shakespeare have been attributed to almost everyon except Shakespeare, from Sir Francis Bacon to Bridey Murphy,[1] and sinc there are almost as many spellings of the name Shakespeare as there ar plays bearing his name, does it not follow then—*per se*, *ipso facto*, and *qui pro quo*—that the Works of Shakespeare were written not by Shakespeare nor necessarily by thirty-nine[2] men named Shakespeare, though spellin their names differently, but by a group of outstanding writers and dilettantes of the day who, for a reason to be discussed later, wished to attribut the plays and poems to the actor Will Shakespeare.

Further, the texts of the plays are far from pure, parts of them bein without question the work of others—actors, managers, prompters, writers typesetters, and even scholars.

[1] As yet no one has actually attributed the plays to Bridey Murphy, but given sufficient tim and sufficient scholars (like Huxley's six monkeys strumming aimlessly on six typewriters fc countless eons, which Huxley claims would eventually produce all the books in the Britis Museum), it is reasonable to assume that some scholar will eventually attribute the plays t Bridey Murphy during one of her reincarnations. In fact, one scholar has seriously advanced th theory that Sir Francis Bacon, born in 1561, is still alive (in a secret room in Windsor Castle) that he is still writing, and that he wrote not only the plays of Shakespeare but those of Georg Bernard Shaw as well.

[2] This number is arbitrary and is based on the thirty-seven plays, the sonnets, and *Venus an Adonis*. Most of the other works, such as *The Phoenix and the Turtle*, are suspect and might hav been written by anyone, even Shakespeare.



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It is also a fact that Shakespeare had only a grammar school education and so lacked the classical education necessary to write the plays in question. The truth is that Shakespeare was probably an illiterate, that he could not spell his own name (even sober, he commonly spelled it five different ways), whereas most of the playwrights of the day were men with university educations.

In addition, the plays show a breadth of knowledge in so many fields that it is almost impossible, let alone probable, for anyone of Shakespeare's time to have experienced or to have known so much.

In one year alone, one eminent scholar, working from "internal evidence in the plays," concluded that during the so-called seven lost years of Shakespeare's life, the "playwright" was a sailor; another concluded that he was a soldier; and a third, that he was a lawyer. How can three such eminent scholars, possessed of such "irrefutable evidence," be wrong? Obviously they can't. It is impossible even to consider. *Ergo*, they must all be right.

Does it not follow then that those other equally eminent scholars who attributed the plays to Sir Francis Bacon, Christopher Marlowe, the Earls of Oxford, Derby, and Rutland, and all the rest—on the basis of equally "incontrovertible proof"—must of necessity be right also?

But how can this be? How indeed! Only if "Shakespeare" were not one but thirty-nine gifted and intelligent poets and playwrights.

But is there evidence to support such an astonishing hypothesis?

Why, for example, did Shakespeare "kill off" Falstaff in *Henry V* (as reported by Mistress Quickly in Act II, Scene iii) after Falstaff had been such an uproarious success in *Henry IV*, Part I and Part II? Could it be that *Henry IV* and *Henry V* were written by different writers—one good at comedy, the other not? And what of the Falstaff in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* who is a mere knave compared with the comic genius of the Falstaff in *Henry IV*? And assuredly the Prince Hal of *Henry IV* is hardly the "father of the man" in *Henry V*.

What do we know of Shakespeare's heritage, for that matter? His father, John Shakespeare, was a husbandman, a yeoman, a glover, a butcher, and a wool dealer. Further, he was a petty politician, holding at various times minor municipal positions. He is known to have been in financial straits, yet he asked for and received a grant of arms. Why? To enable him to poach for a living?

We get the picture of a "political hack," a "ward heeler" who drifted from job to job, a man in dire need of money who saw in the possession of arms the means of making a living.

And what do we know of Shakespeare himself, other than his lack of education? One, that he got Anne Hathaway, a woman older than himself, with

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child and had to marry her. Two, that he was the reputed father of an illegitimate son (Sir Walter d'Avenant) by a barmaid of the Mermaid Tavern, which he admittedly frequented. And three, that once when the actor Richard Burbage had an assignation with a lady of "some" repute, Shakespeare, learning of the assignation, preceded the actor to the lady's bedchamber and barred the door, and that when Burbage arrived and demanded admittance, Shakespeare cried out, "Go! Get thee hence, varlet! Thou know'st King William came before King Richard!"

Three escapades of this sort hardly loom large in a lifetime, but when one considers the little that is known about Shakespeare—a mere handful of facts that will not fill a single page (but which can be made to fill a book, and often have been made to do so)—one can see that by comparison these three incidents loom larger than life-size, assuming gigantic proportions like a genie suddenly released from a bottle.

Further, it is well known that Shakespeare left Stratford-upon-Avon to avoid prosecution for poaching at Charlecote, the estate of Sir Thomas Lucy, and that he was later bound over to keep the peace when he and three others were charged with threatening injury or death to William Wayte.

Here then, we have the picture of a low character indeed, one given to lechery, drunkenness, poaching, and violence; a man who spent his time in bedchambers and bars. Could the "seven lost years" have been spent, not at sea (except figuratively), not in battle (except with his fellows), not before the bar (except that of the Mermaid Tavern and its like), but instead on one gigantic "lost weekend"? [3] How could such a man have had either the time or the inclination, let alone the energy or the genius, to write thirty-seven plays when he was also an actor and a manager—both in themselves full-time jobs?

As for the sonnets, some of which are addressed to a man, convincing many scholars that Shakespeare had homosexual tendencies, could they not have been written by none other than Queen Elizabeth herself? Though it is generally believed that the W.H., to whom the sonnets are dedicated, refers to William Lord Herbert, afterward Earl of Pembroke, or to Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, could not the H be a corruption of R due to a misreading of Queen Elizabeth's crabbed and angular script, making the initials read W.R., for Sir Walter Raleigh, her great and good friend?

As for "the dark lady of the sonnets," isn't it more likely that the spinster spawn of Henry VIII, declared illegitimate by Parliament itself, would have

[3] Shakespeare's daughter Judith married Thomas Quiney, vintner of Stratford-upon-Avon. Like father, like daughter!

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"dark and secret" passions than would Shakespeare, a rather common garden variety of lecher?

But why would thirty-nine people write such deathless plays and poetry and then attribute them to someone else? Why indeed!

Perhaps it came about something like this. One evening—as was their wont—Sir Francis Bacon; Sir Walter Raleigh; Edward Dyer; Edward de Vere, the Earl of Oxford; Henry Wriothesley, the Earl of Southampton; as well as the Earls of Derby and Rutland; and disguised in man's attire, none other than Good Queen Bess herself—all gathered at the Mermaid Tavern.

There, also, were the great playwrights of the day, among them: Christopher Marlowe, author of *The Jew of Malta* (shades of Shylock!); Thomas Kyd, author of a pre-Shakespearian *Hamlet;* John Marston, author of *What You Will* (*Twelfth Night?*); and Ben Jonson, a rare comic genuis (father of Falstaff?); not to mention Thomas Lodge, whose *Scillaes Metamorphosis* (reissued as *Glaucus Scilla*) is conceded to be the prototype of *Venus and Adonis;* Thomas Heywood, who wrote a play, *The Rape of Lucrece;* (remember the Shakespearian poem of the same name?); Samuel Rowley, author of *When you see me, You know me. Or the famous Chronicle Historie of Henry VIII*, which is reminiscent of several of Shakespeare's titles; and without question, Nashe, Dekker, Greene, Lyly, Peele, Munday, Brome, Day, and others.

And though they were too young to be there at the time, undoubtedly Fletcher, Beaumont, Selden, Webster, Massinger, Ford, and others became parties to the hoax later on. Fletcher, for example, wrote *The Tamer Tamed* about the taming of Shakespeare's Petruchio.

Meanwhile back at the Mermaid, Will Shakespeare—actor, drunkard, and lecher—was present—as was his wont—to satisfy his many wants. Drunk and disheveled, a tankard in one hand and a barmaid's shoulder in the other, he was alternately smacking first his lips and then the barmaid's.

While he was thus pleasantly preoccupied and while the others, stirred by wine and wit, were holding animated conversations about the room, Ben Jonson leaped to his feet and cried, "Gentlemen! Good old George [4] here has just given me an idea for a colossal hoax.

"Most of us are university men and so have no love for pedants. Why doesn't each of us then, as a joke on scholars yet unborn in climates yet unknown, write a play and attribute it to some illiterate—say Will Shakespeare there, for example?"

And to a man, including Good Queen Bess, they all agreed.

[4] George Chapman, who was known chiefly for his translations of Homer and who would have known that Homer was, not one, but nine men.

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How else can we interpret Beaumont's poem, *Master Francis Beaumont to Ben Jonson?*

> . . . What things have we seen
> Done at the Mermaid! heard words that have been
> So nimble, and so full of subtle flame,
> As if that every one from whence they came
> Had meant to put his whole wit in a jest,
> And had resolved to live a fool the rest
> Of his dull life.

For in creating "Shakespeare," they, in a sense, destroyed themselves. By attributing their best works to him, they made themselves seem dull by comparison. The joke was on them.

Nor should we overlook Ben Jonson's sly confession in his great poem, *To the Memory of My Beloved Master, William Shakespeare:* "For a good poet's made, as well as born"; or Robert Greene's attack on Shakespeare, whom he refers to as the "Crow, beautified with our feathers," in his *A Groatsworth of Wit bought with a Million of Repentance.*

If further proof is needed, I have made a composite picture of all those to whom Shakespeare's plays have been attributed, including one of Queen Bess with a bald head, and the result looks exactly like Shakespeare after a night of hard carousal.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Since writing this article, I have unhappily discovered *incontestable evidence* that Shakespeare actually wrote the poems and plays in question. While I concede this fact, I feel that it in no way invalidates my arguments and that this article, therefore, should not be denied to my fellow scholars.

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*"I didn't know I was dead until I walked into the bathroom and looked in the mirror . . ."*

*If you can resist that opening sentence, then stop right here . . . a strangely disturbing short-short, with its own wry humor, by the famous comedian, TV star, musician, composer, actor, author, and humanitarian.*

# UNFINISHED BUSINESS

*by STEVE ALLEN*

I DIDN'T KNOW I WAS DEAD UNTIL I walked into the bathroom and looked in the mirror. In fact, I didn't even know it then. All I knew for sure was that I couldn't see anything in the mirror except the wallpaper behind me.

I think I just stood there for perhaps ten seconds. Then I reached out and tried to touch the mirror, because I thought I was asleep on the couch in the den and I figured that if I moved around a bit, so to speak, in my dream I could sort of jar myself awake.

The first moment I really knew I was dead was when I couldn't feel the mirror. I couldn't even see the hand I had stretched out to touch it. That's when I knew there was nothing physical about me. I had identity, I was conscious, but I was invisible. I knew then I had to be either dead or a raving maniac.

Just to be sure, I stepped back into the den. I felt better when I saw my body lying on the couch. I guess that sounds peculiar, but what I mean is, I'd rather be dead than insane. Maybe *you* wouldn't, but that's what makes horse races.

My next sensation was that there was something pressing on my mind, some nagging matter I had almost forgotten. It was very much like the feeling you sometimes have when you walk over to a bookshelf or a clothes closet, let's say, and then suddenly just stand there and say to yourself, "Now why did I come over here?" I felt a bit as if I had an imminent appointment.

I went over to the couch and looked down at myself. The magazine was open on the floor where it had slipped from my hand, and my right foot had fallen down as if I might have been making an effort to get up when I died.

It must have been that round of golf that did it. Larkin had warned me about overexertion as long

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as three years ago, but after a fearful six months I had got steadily more confident. Inactivity annoyed the hell out of me. I remembered the headache that had plagued me over the last three holes, the feeling of utter weariness in the locker room after the game. But the cold shower had refreshed me and I felt pretty good when I got home.

It had come while I was asleep, that's why I didn't recognize it. I mean, if it comes in the form of a deathbed scene with people standing around you shaking their heads, well, it's no surprise. But it came to me while I was lying there asleep in the den after reading the magazine. When I found myself standing in front of the mirror I thought it was all just part of a dream.

It wasn't, of course. You know that. You do if you read the papers, anyway, because they played it up pretty big on page one. *Westchester Man "Dead" for 16 Minutes.*

Notice those quotation marks around the word "dead." That's the way the papers always handle it. I say "always" because it happens all the time. Last year alone there were six of us around the country. Ask any of us about it and we'll just laugh good-naturedly and tell you the papers were right, we weren't dead. What else could we tell you?

So there I was, beside the couch, staring down at myself. I felt a flicker of some kind that would be hard to describe: an urgency, an anxiety, a realization that I had left a few things undone. Then I tried a ridiculous thing. I tried to get back into myself. But it wouldn't work. I couldn't do it alone.

Jo would have to help, although we had just had a bitter argument. She had been in the kitchen when I had gone in to take a nap. I hurried to the kitchen. "Jo," I said, but of course she couldn't hear me.

However, suddenly she stood up, wiped her hands, and walked down the hall to the den. I don't know how, but in some vague way she had got the message.

She let out a tiny scream when she saw the color of my face. Then she shook me and said, "Oh, my God," and started to cry, quietly. Thank Heaven she didn't go to pieces or I wouldn't be able to tell the tale today.

Still crying, she ran to the hall telephone and called Larkin. He was at the house inside of ten minutes. I remember he ran past me as I stood at the door of the den and knelt down beside my body on the couch. "When did you find him?" he said.

"Ten minutes ago," Jo said.

He injected the body with Adrenalin, and then they bundled "me" off to the hospital. I followed.

I never would have believed a crew could work so fast. Oxygen. More Adrenalin. And then one of the doctors pushed a button and the table my body was on began to lift, first at one end and then at the other, like a slow teeter-totter.

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"Watch for blood pressure," Larkin whispered to an assistant.

I was so fascinated watching them I did not at first realize I had visitors.

"Interesting," a voice said.

"Yes," I answered, without consciously directing my attention away from the body on the tilting table. Then I felt at one and the same time a pang of fear and the release of the nagging anxiety that had troubled me earlier. I must have been expecting them. There was one on each side of me.

The second one looked at the body, then at Larkin. "Do you think they'll succeed?" he said.

"I don't know," I said. "I hope so."

The two looked at each other. "Would it matter so much to you either way?" one of them said.

"Why, yes," I said. "I suppose it would. I mean, there's work I've left unfinished."

"Work isn't important *now,* is it?"

"No," I agreed. "It isn't. But there are things I have to do for Jo, for the children."

Again the two seemed to confer, silently. "What sort of things?"

"Oh," I said, "there are some business details. There'll be legal trouble, I'm sure, about the distribution of the assets of my firm."

"Is that all?" the first one said, coming closer to me. Larkin began to shake his head, slowly. He looked as if he were losing hope.

Then I thought of something else. "You'll laugh," I said, "but there *is* something."

"What?" asked the second one.

"I would like to apologize to Jo," I said, "because we had an argument this afternoon. I'd forgotten I'd promised to take her and the children out to dinner and a movie. We had an argument about it. I suppose it sounds ridiculous at a time like this but I'd like to apologize to her. And I'd like to take the children to see that movie, even if it is some cowboys-and-Indians thing that'll bore the hell out of me."

That's when it all began to happen. I can't say that suddenly the two were gone. To say *I* was gone would be more to the point. They didn't leave me—I left them. I was still unconscious, but now I was on the table, myself.

That night when I woke up, I felt weak and shaky. There was an oxygen tent over my chest and head, and my mouth felt dry and stiff. But I was alive. I could see Larkin and I could see Jo. She looked beautiful.

The next day the men from the papers came around and interviewed me. They wrote that I was in good spirits and was sitting up in bed joking with the nurses, which was something of an exaggeration. It was almost a month before I could keep that date with Jo and the kids.

People still ask me what I felt while I was "dead." They always

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treat it as something a little bit amusing. And I go along with it, of course. You can't say to them, "Why, yes, I was dead." They'd lock you up.

Funny thing about it all was that I'd always been afraid of the idea of death. But after dying, I wasn't. I always knew I'd eventually die again, but it never worried me. I did my best to make a go of my relationships with other people and that was about the size of it. One other thing I did was write this little story and give it to a friend of mine, to be published only after my death.

If you're reading it, that means I've gone again. But this time I won't be back.

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## THE OLD FRONTIER: *Anthropoid Epic*

*Let's journey back into time—back to our childhood reading. Who were your literary heroes and heroines in the period between, say, the reading of Horatio Alger, Pollyanna, Peter Pan, and Tom Swift and the reading of the more serious books which opened new doors and windows into the future—books like Butler's* THE WAY OF ALL FLESH, *Rolland's* JEAN CHRISTOPHE, *Maugham's* OF HUMAN BONDAGE, *Cabell's* JURGEN, *Wasserman's* THE WORLD'S ILLUSION, *Hamsun's* GROWTH OF THE SOIL, *Fitzgerald's* THIS SIDE OF PARADISE, *Lewis'* BABBITT *and* ARROWSMITH, *and so many others.*

*Surely in our young teens many of us hero-worshipped Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn, Penrod, and D'Artagnan. But note this curious and interesting fact: all four of these childhood (and perhaps manhood and womanhood) heroes have dabbled at detection, in episodes or full-length stories. It would really be nothing new or special, therefore, if we brought you an incident of detection starring Tom Sawyer, Huck Finn, Penrod, or D'Artagnan.*

*So let us ask you this question: of your other childhood fictional heroes and heroines, which would you choose (if you had a choice) to read about in the role of detective? Alice in Wonderland as a child criminologist? What a miraculous discovery that would be! But, alas, we know of no such 'tec tidbit written by Lewis Carroll. The Wizard of Oz as a magician-manhunter? Ah, what a wondrous delight that would be! But, alas and alack, we know of no such 'tec tale written by L. Frank Baum (although we did once publish a "locked room" mystery by the creator of Oz—see "The Suicide of Kiaros" in the November 1954 issue of EQMM). Who else would make an unexpected, an astonishing detective?*

*Well, here is our nomination: Tarzan of the Apes as a dyed-in-the-blood detective—and, believe it or not, we can give you just such a story! Here is the one and only ape-man in a story titled "Tarzan, Jungle Detective" in which the Natty Bumppo of the African jungle takes up the trail of a kidnaper and equals—no, outdoes—any civilized sleuth from Poe's Dupin to the latest procedural plainclothesman . . .*

*A few facts about the creator of Tarzan and the living legend he has bequeathed to us: Edgar Rice Burroughs died in 1950 at the age of 74; he*



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*had been a cattle drover in Idaho, a worker on an Oregon gold dredge, a railroad policeman in Salt Lake City, a clerk, peddler, accountant, salesman, and a war correspondent (at 66!) in the Pacific. At the age of 36, in 1911, he and his multifarious careers were all complete failures, and the only recreation he could afford was to daydream weird and wild adventures. Then one day he decided he could write as well as the authors whose work he had read in the "pulps"—all he had to do was to put his daydreams and reveries into words.*

*He wrote the first Tarzan story* (TARZAN OF THE APES) *in 1912 and it was published in "All-Story Magazine," which paid Burroughs $700; as a book it appeared in 1914, and this first Tarzan book has sold a million copies, without benefit of mass-produced paperback editions; it is still in print. The total sales of the 23 Tarzan books, translated into 56 languages and dialects, are more than 30,000,000. (Ballantine Books distributed 1,000,000 copies of the Tarzan titles in July 1963 alone.)*

*In addition to the books there have been about 40 motion pictures (celluloid anthropoid), 33 years of comic strips (tabloid anthropoid), many radio adventures and TV revivals (anthropoid without Freud). Tarzan is the longest-living movie character in Hollywood history, beginning in 1918 with "Tarzan of the Apes" starring Elmo Lincoln, the first of 13 motion-picture Tarzans of whom Johnny Weissmuller, perhaps the most famous, was the ninth to beat the Tarzan breast and emit the Tarzan yell . . . And did you know that commercial products 30 years ago included Tarzan shirts, Tarzan chewing gum, and Tarzan bread?*

*All of which has made Tarzan a permanent name in the English language and a household word on six continents—even though (fie on realism!) Edgar Rice Burroughs never saw or visited Africa even once! The explanation of such a phenomenon? It must lie in the universality of Tarzan's appeal—he has, no doubt about it, the stature of folklore which, with imagination, suspense, and excitement, make an irresistible combination for young and old all over this thrill-hungry planet . . .*

*Now, as we said in the beginning, let's journey back into time . . .*

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# TARZAN, JUNGLE DETECTIVE

*by EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS*

THE DAY WAS PERFECT. A COOL breeze tempered the heat of the quatorial sun. Peace had reigned ithin the tribe for weeks and no ien enemy had trespassed on its reserves from without. To the ape-ind this was sufficient evidence iat the future would be identical ith the past.

The sentinels—now from habit ecome a fixed tribal custom—either laxed their vigilance or deserted ieir posts, as the whim seized them. he tribe was far scattered in search f food.

One might have thought Numa nd Sabor and Sheeta entirely de-ted from the scheme of things. he shes and their little balus oamed unguarded through the sul-n jungle, while the greedy males oraged far afield.

Thus it was that Teeka and Gazan, er balu, hunted on the extreme outhern edge of the tribe with no rown male near them.

Still farther south there moved hrough the forest a sinister figure—huge bull ape, maddened by soli-ude and defeat. A week before he ad contended for the kingship of a istant tribe. Now battered, still sore, e roamed the wilderness an outcast.

Later he might return to his own ribe and submit to the will of the airy brute he had attempted to dethrone; but for the time being he dared not do so, since he had sought not only the crown but the wives of his lord and master. It would require an entire moon at least to bring forgetfulness to him he had wronged. So Toog wandered a strange jungle, grim, terrible, hate-filled.

It was in this mental state that Toog came unexpectedly on a young she feeding alone in the jungle—a stranger she, lithe and strong and beautiful beyond compare. Toog caught his breath and slunk quickly to one side of the trail where the dense foliage of the tropical underbrush concealed him from Teeka while permitting him to feast his eyes on her loveliness.

But those eyes were not only concerned with Teeka—they roved the surrounding jungle in search of the bulls and cows and balus of her tribe, though principally for the bulls. When one covets a she of an alien tribe, one must take into consideration the great, fierce, hairy guardians who seldom wander far from their wards and who will fight a stranger to the death in protection of the mate or offspring of a fellow, precisely as they would fight for their own.

Toog could see no sign of any ape other than the strange she and a young balu playing nearby. His wicked, bloodshot eyes half closed

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as they rested on the charms of the former. As for the balu, one snap of Toog's great jaws on the back of its little neck would prevent it from raising any alarm.

Toog was a big, strong male, resembling in many ways Teeka's mate, Taug. Each was in his prime, and each was wonderfully muscled, perfectly fanged, and as ferocious as the most exacting she could wish. Had Toog been of her own tribe, Teeka might as readily have yielded to him as to Taug when her mating time arrived; but now she was Taug's and no other male could claim her without first defeating Taug in combat.

And even then Teeka retained some rights in the matter. If she did not favor a new mate, she could enter the lists with her rightful mate and do her part toward discouraging the new suitor's advances—a part, too, which would prove no mean assistance to her lord and master, for Teeka, even though her fangs were smaller than a male's, could use them to excellent effect.

Just now Teeka was occupied in a fascinating search for beetles, to the exclusion of all else. She did not realize how far she and Gazan had become separated from the tribe, nor were her defensive senses as alert as they should have been.

Toog, having satisfied himself that only the she and her balu were in the vicinity, crept stealthily forward. Teeka's back was toward him when he finally rushed on her; but her senses were at last awakened to t presence of danger and she wheel to face the strange bull just befc he reached her.

Toog halted a few paces from h His anger fled before the seducti feminine charms of the stranger. I made conciliatory noises—a speci of clucking sound with his bro flat lips. But Teeka only bared h fangs and growled.

Little Gazan started to run t ward his mother, but she warn him away with a quick "Kreeg-ah telling him to run high into a t tree. Evidently Teeka was not in pressed by her new suitor. Toc altered his methods accordingly. H swelled his giant chest, beat on with his callused knuckles, ar swaggered to and fro before her.

"I am Toog," he boasted. "Loc at my fighting fangs. Look at m great arms and my mighty leg With one bite I can slay your bigge bull. Alone have I slain Sheeta. I a Toog, and Toog wants you."

Then he waited for the effect, an he did not have long to wait. Teek turned with a swiftness that belie her great weight and bolted in th opposite direction. Toog, with a angry growl, leaped in pursuit; bu the smaller, lighter female was tc fleet for him. He chased her for few yards and then, foaming an barking, he halted and beat th ground with his hard fists.

From the tree above, little Gaza looked down and witnessed th stranger bull's discomfiture. Bein

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ung, and thinking himself safe ove the reach of the heavy male, azan screamed an ill-timed insult their tormentor.

Toog looked up. Teeka had halted a little distance—she would not too far from her balu. Toog uickly realized that and as quickly termined to take advantage of it. e saw that the tree in which the ung ape squatted was isolated and at Gazan could not reach another ee without first coming to earth. e would obtain the mother rough her love for her young.

Toog swung himself into the lower anches of the tree. Little Gazan ased to insult him; his expression deviltry changed to one of appre-ension, which was quickly followed y fear as Toog continued to ascend ward him.

Teeka screamed to Gazan to climb gher, and the little fellow scam-ered upward among the tiny anches which would not support ie weight of the great bull. Never-ieless, Toog kept climbing.

Teeka was not too fearful. She ok it for granted that the bull ould climb as high as he could to-ard Gazan and then, finding that e could not safely reach the balu, sume his pursuit of her, which she new would prove equally fruitless r him. So certain was she of the fety of Gazan and her ability to ke care of herself that she did not oice the cry for help that might ave brought the other members of ie tribe racing to her side.

Toog reached the limit to which he dared risk his great weight on the slender branches. Gazan was still fifteen feet above him. The bull braced himself, seized the main branch in his powerful hands, and commenced to shake it vigorously.

Teeka was appalled. Gazan clung far out on a swaying limb. At the first shake he lost his balance, though he did not fall, still clinging with his four hands; but Toog redoubled his efforts.

Teeka saw all too plainly what the outcome must be. Forgetting her own danger, she rushed forward to climb the tree and give battle to the fearsome creature that menaced the life of her little one.

Before she reached the tree, Toog had succeeded, by violent shaking of the branch, to loosen Gazan's hold. With a cry the little fellow plunged through the foliage, clutching futiley for a new hold, and lighted with a sickening thud at his mother's feet, where he lay silent and motionless. Moaning, Teeka stooped to lift the still form in her arms; but at the same instant Toog was there.

Struggling and biting, she fought to free herself; but the giant muscles of the great bull were too much for her. Toog struck and choked her until, half unconscious, Teeka collapsed. Then the bull lifted her to his shoulder and turned back to the trail toward the south from which he had come.

On the ground lay little Gazan. He did not moan. He did not move.

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The sun rose slowly toward meridian. A mangy thing, lifting its nose to scent the jungle breeze, crept through the underbrush. It was Dango, the hyena. Presently its ugly muzzle broke through some nearby foliage and its cruel eyes fastened on Gazan . . .

Early that morning Tarzan of the Apes had gone to the cabin by the sea, where he passed many an hour at such times as the tribe was ranging in the vicinity. On the floor lay the skeleton of a man—all that remained of the former Lord Greystoke—lay as it had fallen some twenty years before when Kerchak, the great ape, had thrown it, lifeless, there.

Long since, the termites and the small rodents had picked clean the English bones. For years Tarzan had seen it lying there, giving it no more attention than he gave the countless thousand bones that strewed his jungle haunts. On the bed another and smaller skeleton reposed, and the youth ignored it as he ignored the other. How could he know that the one had been his father, the other his mother?

To Tarzan they were bones—just bones. He knew no necessity for a bed, and the skeleton on the floor he easily could step over.

Today Tarzan was restless. He turned the pages first of one book and then of another. He glanced at pictures he knew by heart, and tossed the books aside. He rummaged for the thousandth time in the cupboard. He took out a b that contained several small rou pieces of metal. He had played wi them many times in the years go by; but always he replaced the carefully in the bag, and the bag the cupboard, on the very sh where he had first discovered it.

The round pieces of metal in t little bag always interested hi Raised pictures were on either sid the meaning of which he did n understand. The pieces were brig and shiny. It amused him to arran them in various figures on the tab Hundreds of times had he play thus. Today, while so engaged, dropped a lovely yellow piece— English sovereign—and it rolled b neath the bed where lay all that w mortal of the once beautiful La Alice.

Tarzan at once dropped to h hands and knees and searched b neath the bed for the lost gold piec He had never before looked benea the bed. He found the gold piec and something else, too—a sm wooden box with a loose cover.

Bringing them both out, he r turned the sovereign to its bag a the bag to its shelf in the cupboar then he investigated the box. It co tained a quantity of cylindrical b of metal, cone-shaped at one e and flat at the other, with a projec ing rim. They were all quite gre and dull, coated with verdigris.

Tarzan removed a handful them from the box and examin them. He rubbed one on anoth

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nd discovered that the green came ff, leaving a shiny surface for two-hirds of their length and a dull gray ver the cone-shaped end. Finding a it of wood he rubbed one of the ylinders and was rewarded by a lus-rous sheen which pleased him.

At his side hung a pocket pouch aken from the body of one of the umerous black warriors he had lain. Into this pouch he put a hand-ul of the new playthings, thinking o polish them at his leisure; then he eplaced the box beneath the bed; nd finding nothing more to amuse im, he left the cabin and started ack in the direction of the tribe.

Shortly before he reached them ie heard a great commotion ahead f him—the screams of shes and alus, the angry barking and growl-ng of the bulls. Instantly he in-reased his speed, for the "Kreeg-hs" that came to his ears warned im that something was amiss with is fellows.

Taug, Teeka's mate, had been unting a mile to the north of the ribe. His belly filled at last, he had turned lazily back toward the clear-ng where he had last seen the tribe, nd presently he began to pass its members scattered alone or in twos or threes. Nowhere did he see Teeka or Gazan, and he inquired of the other apes where they might be; but none had seen them recently.

Taug did not fear that any mis-fortune had overtaken his mate and offspring—he merely knew that he wished to find Teeka that he might lie down in the shade and have her scratch his back while his breakfast digested. But though he called to her and searched for her and asked each one he met, he could find no trace of Teeka or Gazan.

He was moving south along a game trail, his callused soles and knuckles giving forth no sound, when he came on Dango at the op-posite side of a small clearing. The eater of carrion did not see Taug. His eyes were for something that lay in the grass beneath a tree—some-thing on which he was sneaking with the cautious stealth of his breed.

Taug, always cautious himself, as behooves one who fares up and down the jungle and desires to survive, swung noiselessly into a tree, where he could have a better view of the clearing. He did not fear Dango; but he wanted to see what it was that Dango stalked. He was moti-vated as much by curiosity as by caution.

He saw Dango sniffing at some-thing directly beneath him. It was the lifeless form of little Gazan.

With a cry so frightful, so bestial, that it momentarily paralyzed the startled Dango, the great ape launched his mighty bulk on the surprised hyena. With a cry and a snarl Dango, crushed to earth, turned to tear at his assailant; but as effectively might a sparrow turn on a hawk. Taug's great gnarled fingers closed on the hyena's throat and

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back, his jaws snapped once on the mangy neck, crushing the vertebrae, and then he hurled the dead body contemptuously aside.

Again he raised his voice in the call of the bull ape to its mate, but there was no reply. He leaned down to sniff at the body of Gazan.

In Taug it was not the protective instinct alone which was highly developed; it was affection for his offspring as well. For Taug was an unusually intelligent specimen of those great manlike apes which the natives of the Gobi speak of in whispers, but which no white man had ever seen until Tarzan of the Apes came among them.

And so Taug felt sorrow, as any other father might feel sorrow at the loss of a little child. For a moment he sniffed at the quiet little form. With his muzzle and his tongue he smoothed and caressed the rumpled coat. From his savage lips broke a low moan.

Leaping to his feet he screamed out a volley of "Kreeg-ahs," punctuated from time to time by the freezing cry of a bull with the blood lust strong upon him.

Answering his cries came those of the tribe as they swung through the trees toward him. It was these that Tarzan heard on his return from the cabin, and in reply he raised his own voice and hurried forward with increased speed until he fairly flew through the middle terraces of the forest.

When at last he came to the tribe, he saw their members gathere around Taug and something whic lay quietly on the ground. Droppin among them, Tarzan approached th center of the group. Taug was sti roaring out his challenges; but whe he saw Tarzan he ceased and, stoop ing, picked up Gazan in his arms an held him out for Tarzan to see.

Of all the bulls of the tribe, Tau held affection for Tarzan only Tarzan he trusted and looked up t as one wiser and more cunning. T Tarzan he came now—to the play mate of his balu days, the companio of innumerable battles in his ma turity.

When Tarzan saw the still form i Taug's arms, a low growl broke fror his lips, for he too loved Teeka little balu.

"Who did it?" he asked. "Wher is Teeka?"

"I do not know," replied Taug "I found him lying here with Dang about to feed on him; but it was no Dango that did it—there are no fan marks on him."

Tarzan came closer and placed a ear against Gazan's breast. "He not dead," he said. "Maybe he wi not die."

He pressed through the crowd c apes and circled once around them examining the ground step by step Suddenly he stopped and placed h nose close to the earth and sniffed Then he sprang to his feet, giving peculiar cry.

Taug and the others pressed for ward, for the sound told them tha

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the hunter had found the spoor of his quarry.

"A stranger bull has been here," said Tarzan. "It was he that hurt Gazan. And he has carried off Teeka."

Taug and the other bulls commenced to roar and threaten; but they did nothing. Had the stranger bull been within sight they would have torn him to pieces; but it did not occur to them to follow him.

"If the three bulls had been watching around the tribe this would not have happened," said Tarzan. "Such things will happen as long as you do not keep the three bulls watching for an enemy. The jungle is full of enemies, and yet you let your shes and balus feed where they will, alone and unprotected. Tarzan goes now to find Teeka and bring her back to the tribe."

The idea appealed to the other bulls. "We will all go," they cried.

"No," said Tarzan, "you will not all go. We can not take shes and balus when we go out to hunt and fight. You must remain to guard them or you will lose them all."

They scratched their heads. The wisdom of his advice was dawning on them. In the past no one ever had thought to go forth in search of the shes that were occasionally stolen from the tribe. If Numa, Sabor, Sheeta, or a wandering bull ape from another tribe chanced to carry off a maid or a matron while no one was looking, that was the end of it—she was gone, that was all. The bereaved husband, if the victim chanced to have been mated, growled around for a day or two and then, if he were strong enough, took another mate from within the tribe. If not, he wandered far into the jungle on the chance of stealing one from another community.

Tarzan of the Apes had condoned this practice for the reason that he had had no interest in those who had been stolen; but Teeka had been his first love and Teeka's balu held a special place in his heart.

He turned to Taug: "Leave Gazan with Mumga," he said. "She is old and her fangs are broken and she is no good; but she can take care of Gazan until we return with Teeka, and if Gazan is dead when we come back," he turned to Mumga, "I will kill you, too."

"Where are we going?" asked Taug.

"We are going to find Teeka," replied the ape-man, "and kill the bull who has stolen her. Come!"

He turned again to the spoor of the stranger bull, and he did not glance back to see if Taug followed. The latter laid Gazan in Mumga's arms with a parting: "If he dies Tarzan will kill you," and he followed after the brown-skinned figure that already was moving at a slow trot along the jungle trail.

No other bull of the tribe of Kerchak was so good a trailer as Tarzan, for his trained senses were aided by a high order of intelligence. His judgment told him the natural

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trail for a quarry to follow, so that he need but note the most apparent marks on the way. The trail of Toog was as plain to him as type on a printed page to a civilized person.

Following close behind the lithe figure of the ape-man came the huge and shaggy bull ape. No words passed between them. They moved silently among the myriad shadows of the forest.

Alert as his eyes and ears was Tarzan's nose. The spoor was fresh, and now that they had passed from the range of the strong ape odor of the tribe, he had little difficulty in following Toog and Teeka by scent alone. Teeka's familiar scent spoor told both Tarzan and Taug that they were on her trail, and soon the scent of Toog became as familiar as the other.

Suddenly dense clouds overcast the sun. Tarzan accelerated his pace. Now they fairly flew along the jungle trail; or, where Toog had taken to the trees, followed nimbly as squirrels along the bending, undulating pathway of the branches, swinging from tree to tree as Toog had swung before them, but more rapidly because they were not handicapped by a burden.

Tarzan felt that they must be getting near their quarry, for the scent spoor was becoming stronger and stronger, when the jungle was suddenly shot by livid lightning, and a deafening roar of thunder reverberated through the heavens and the forest until the earth trembled and shook. Then came the rain—not as it comes to temperate zones, but as a mighty avalanche of water, a deluge which poured tons instead of drops on the bending forest giants and the terrified creatures that haunt their shade.

And the rain wiped the spoor of their quarry from the face of the earth.

For a half hour the torrents fell—then the sun burst forth, jeweling the forest with a million scintillant gems; but today the ape-man, usually alert to the changing wonders of the jungle, saw them not.

Even among the branches of the trees there are well-worn trails, just as there are trails on the surface of the ground; but in the trees they branch and cross more often, since the way is more open than in the dense undergrowth at the surface.

Along one of these well-marked trails Tarzan and Taug now continued after the rain had ceased, because the ape-man knew this was the most logical path for the kidnaper to follow; but when they came to a fork, they were at a loss. Here they halted, while Tarzan examined every branch and leaf which might have been touched by the fleeing ape.

He sniffed the bole of the tree, and with his keen eyes he sought to find on the bark some sign of the direction their quarry had taken. It was slow work. All the time, Tarzan knew, the bull of the alien tribe was forging steadily away from them—gaining precious minutes that might

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carry him to safety before they could catch up with him.

First along one fork Tarzan went, and then another, applying every test that his wonderful junglecraft was cognizant of; but again and again he was baffled, for the scent had been washed away by the heavy downpour in every exposed place. For a half hour Tarzan and Taug searched until, on the bottom of a broad leaf, Tarzan's keen nose caught the faint trace of the scent spoor of Toog, where the leaf had brushed a hairy shoulder as the great ape passed through the foliage.

Once again the two took up the trail. It was slow work now, and there were many discouraging delays when the spoor seemed lost beyond recovery. To civilized trackers there would have been no spoor, except where Toog had come to earth and followed a game trail. In such places the imprint of a huge hand-like foot and the knuckles of one great hand were sometimes plain enough for an ordinary mortal to read.

Tarzan knew from these and other indications that the ape was still carrying Teeka. The depth of the imprint of his feet indicated a much greater weight than that of even the largest bulls, for the prints were made under the combined weight of Toog and Teeka; and the fact that the knuckles of but one hand touched the ground at any time showed that the other hand was occupied in some other business—the business of holding the prisoner to a hairy shoulder.

Tarzan could follow, in sheltered places, the changing of the burden from one shoulder to another, as indicated by the deepening of the foot imprint on the side of the load, and the changing of the knuckle imprints from one side of the trail to the other.

There were stretches along the surface paths where the ape had gone for considerable distances entirely erect on his hind feet—walking as a man walks; for, unlike the chimpanzee and the gorilla, the great anthropoids walk without the aid of their hands quite as readily as with. It was such things that helped Tarzan to identify the abductor; and with his individual scent already indelibly impressed on his memories, they were in a far better position to know him when they came upon him, even should he have disposed of Teeka before, than is a modern detective with his photographs and Bertillon measurements equipped to recognize a fugitive from civilized justice.

For all their highstrung and delicately perceptive faculties, the two bulls of the tribe of Kerchak were often sore pressed to follow the trail at all, and at best were so delayed that in the afternoon of the second day they still had not overtaken the kidnaper. But the scent was now strong, for it had been made since the rain, and Tarzan knew that it

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would not be long before they reached the thief and his loot.

Above them, as they crept stealthily forward, chattered Manu, the monkey, and his thousand fellows; squawked and screamed the brazen-throated birds of plumage; buzzed and hummed the countless insects amid the rustling of the forest leaves. A little graybeard, squeaking and scolding on a swaying branch, looked down and saw them. Instantly the scolding and the squeaking ceased, and off tore the long-tailed mite of a monkey as though Sheeta, the panther, were in close pursuit of him . . .

Meanwhile, Teeka was torn and bleeding from many wounds, inflicted by the sullen Toog in his vain efforts to subdue her. Toog, too, was disfigured and mutilated; but with stubborn ferocity he clung to his prize.

On through the jungle he forced his way in the direction of the stamping ground of his own tribe. He hoped that the king would have forgotten Toog's treason; but if not, any fate would be better than suffering longer the companionship of this frightful she. Then, too, he wished to exhibit his captive to his fellows. Maybe he could wish her on the king—as a gift, Teeka might win Toog a pardon.

At last they came on two bulls feeding in a parklike grove—a beautiful grove dotted with huge boulders half embedded in the rich loam, mute monuments, possibly, to a forgotten age when mighty glaciers rolled their slow course where now a torrid sun beats down on a tropic jungle.

The two bulls looked up, baring long fighting fangs, as Toog appeared in the distance. The latter recognized the two as friends. "It is Toog," he growled. "Toog has come back with a new she."

The apes awaited Toog's nearer approach. Teeka turned a snarling, fanged face toward them. She was not pretty to look on, yet through the blood and hatred on her countenance they realized that she was beautiful, and they envied Toog. Alas, they did not know Teeka.

As they squatted, there raced through the trees toward them a long-tailed little monkey with gray whiskers. He was a very excited little monkey when he came to a halt on the limb of a tree directly overhead.

"Two strange bulls come," he cried. "One is a Mangani, the other a hideous ape without hair on his body. They follow the spoor of Toog. I saw them."

The apes turned their eyes backward along the trail Toog had just traveled; then they looked at one another. "Come," said the larger of Toog's two friends, "we will wait for the strangers in the thick bushes beyond the clearing."

He turned and waddled away across the open place, the others following him. The little monkey

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danced about. His chief diversion in life was to cause bloody encounters between the larger denizens of the forest so that he might sit in the safety of the trees and witness the battles. He was a glutton for gore, was this little whiskered gray monkey, so long as it was the gore of others.

The apes hid themselves in the shrubbery beside the trail along which the two stranger bulls would pass. Teeka trembled with excitement. She had heard the words of Manu, and she knew that the hairless ape must be Tarzan while the other was, undoubtedly, her own Taug. Never in her wildest hopes had she expected help of this sort. Her one thought had been possibly to escape and find her way back to the tribe of Kerchak.

As Taug and Tarzan reached the grove where Toog had met his friends, the ape scent became so strong that both knew the quarry was only a short distance ahead. And so they went even more cautiously, for they wished to come upon the thief from behind if they could and charge him before he was aware of their presence. That a little gray-whiskered monkey had forestalled them they did not know, nor that three pairs of savage eyes were already watching their every move and waiting for them to come within reach of paws and slavering jowls.

On they came across the grove, and as they entered the path leading into the dense jungle beyond, a sudden "Kreeg-ah!" shrilled out close before them—a "Kreeg-ah" in the familiar voice of Teeka. The small brains of Toog and his companions had not been able to foresee that Teeka might betray them, and now they went wild with rage.

Toog struck the she a mighty blow that felled her, and then the three bulls rushed forth to do battle with Tarzan and Taug. The little monkey danced on his perch and screamed with delight.

And indeed he might well be delighted, for it was a battle royal. There were no preliminaries, no formalities, no introductions—the five bulls merely charged and clinched. They rolled in the narrow trail and into the thick verdure beside it. They bit and clawed and scratched and struck, and all the while they kept up the most frightful chorus of growlings and barkings and roarings. In five minutes all five were torn and bleeding.

Taug had been set upon by Toog and another of the apes, while Tarzan had the third—a huge brute with the strength of a buffalo. Never before had Tarzan's assailant beheld so strange a creature as this slippery, hairless bull with which he struggled. Sweat and blood covered Tarzan's sleek brown hide. Again and again he slipped from the clutches of the great bull, and all the while he tried to free his hunting knife from the scabbard in which it had stuck.

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At length Tarzan succeeded—a brown hand shot out and clutched a hairy throat, another flew upward clutching the sharp blade. Three swift, powerful strokes and the bull relaxed with a groan, falling limp beneath his antagonist.

Instantly, Tarzan broke from the clutches of the dying bull and sprang to Taug's assistance. Toog saw him coming and wheeled to meet him. In the impact of the charge Tarzan's knife was wrenched from his hand and then Toog closed with him.

Now was the battle even—two against two—while on the verge Teeka, recovered from the blow that had felled her, slunk waiting for an opportunity to aid. She saw Tarzan's knife and picked it up. She had never used it. Always had she been afraid of the thing which dealt death to the mightiest in the jungle with the ease that Tantor's great tusks dealt death to Tantor's enemies.

She saw Tarzan's pocket pouch, torn from his side, and with the curiosity of an ape that even danger and excitement cannot entirely dispel, she picked this up, too.

Now the bulls were standing—the clinches had been broken. Blood streamed down their sides—their faces were crimsoned with it.

Back across the grove Tarzan and Taug forced their adversaries. Teeka followed slowly. She hardly knew what to do. She was lame and sore and exhausted from the frightful ordeal through which she had passed, and she had the confidence of her sex in the prowess of her mate and the other bull of her tribe—they would not need the help of a she in their fight with two strangers.

The roars and screams of the fighters reverberated through the jungle, awakening echoes in the distant hills. From the throat of Tarzan's antagonist had come a score of "Kreeg-ahs!" and now from behind came the reply he had awaited. Into the grove, barking and growling, came a score of apes—the fighting bulls of Toog's tribe.

Teeka saw them first and screamed a warning to Tarzan and Taug. Then she fled past the fighters toward the opposite side of the clearing, fear claiming her for the moment.

Down on them came the great apes. In a moment Tarzan and Taug would be torn to shreds that would later form the *pièce de résistance* of the savage orgy of a Dum-Dum.

Teeka turned to glance back. She saw the impending fate of her defenders and there sprang to life in her savage bosom the spark of martyrdom that some common ancestor had transmitted alike to Teeka, the wild ape, and to the shes of a higher order who have invited death for their men. With a shrill scream Teeka ran toward the battlers, who were rolling in a great mass at the foot of one of the huge boulders which dotted the grove. But what could she do?

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She could not use the knife to advantage because of her lesser strength. She had seen Tarzan throw missiles, and she had learned this with many other things from her childhood playmate. She sought for something to throw and her fingers closed on the hard objects in the pouch that had been torn from the ape-man.

Tearing the receptacle open, Teeka gathered a handful of shiny cylinders—heavy for their size, they seemed to her, and good missiles—and with all her strength she hurled them at the apes battling in front of the granite boulder.

The result surprised Teeka quite as much as it did the apes. There was a loud explosion, and a puff of acrid smoke. Never before had any of them heard such a dreadful noise in the jungle.

Screaming with terror, the stranger bulls leaped to their feet and fled back toward the stamping ground of their tribe, while Taug and Tarzan slowly gathered themselves together and rose, lame and bleeding. They, too, would have fled had they not seen Teeka standing there before them, the knife and the pocket pouch in her hands.

"What was it?" asked Tarzan.

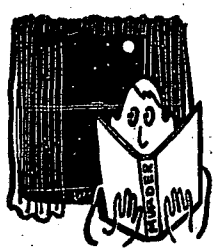
Teeka shook her head. "I hurled these at the stranger bulls," and she held forth another handful of the shiny metal cylinders with the dull-gray, cone-shaped ends.

Tarzan looked at them and scratched his head.

"What are they?" asked Taug.

"I do not know," said Tarzan of the Apes. "I found them."

He did not know that his dead father, reaching back out of the past across a span of twenty years, had saved his life.

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*a new Minerva Club story*

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: VICTOR CANNING

TITLE: *The Trojan Crate*

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: London

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Dog Downey was a master at his trade—dognaping. But then he got a chance to go up in the world—to become Maxy Martingale's crate man . . .*

AS MILKY WAYE, THE SECRETARY of the Minerva Club, was fond of saying, of all the members of the Club there was not one who could come up to Dog Downey for sheer goodness of heart. But as far as intelligence went, Dog was a long way from the top class. Mostly he worked in a minor capacity for other members of the Club. The only thing he did on his own was dog stealing—what might be called dognaping—at which he was an acknowledged master. Downey loved and understood dogs more than he did any creature, four- or two-legged. He could do anything with them.

Downey was a short, ugly man with a great mop of brown hair that fell forward across his face and gave him a shaggy look. Women, seeing him coming, would cross the road—which was a great pity for Downey had the utmost respect for women, though he had long reconciled himself to his bachelor state. At the age of twenty he had qualified for membership in the Club—no member is admitted to the august halls in Brook Street unless he has done at least two years in one of Her Majesty's Prisons.

At the time of this story Downey had just completed a rewarding piece of work. He had stolen a

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valuable litter of four six-month-old Alsatian pups from a van which was delivering them to Cruft's Dog Show, and he had trained them until they were reliable house dogs and then sold them through an agent of his to various clients at fifty guineas apiece. Each time Downey parted with a dog it was like a sailor's farewell to his bride.

He came into the Minerva Club four days after this, his face as long as a fiddle with all its strings broken. We tried to cheer him up with brandy but it didn't work. In the end Maxy Martingale offered to take him in on a scheme he had just worked out. You should have seen the light in Downey's eyes at the thought of working with the great Maxy.

Maxy Martingale was brilliant. He was a tall, distinguished man who dressed like a City banker, had a voice like an Archbishop, and the charm of a matinee idol. Dog Downey instantly became one of his men and Downey's warm heart overflowed at Maxy's kindness.

Maxy's scheme was simple, brilliant with the polish of genius, and cheap to operate. Maxy would choose a wealthy house where there was silver, paintings, an easy safe to crack or a fine collection of jewels to pick up—on the outside Maxy moved in good society and was well-informed—and then wait until he knew the owners were away for the night and the place manned only by the house staff. At about half-past five in the afternoon a van would draw up outside the house and a trio of Maxy's men would deliver a large packing case with the label of some big firm on it. The boys would dump the crate in the hall, get a servant to sign for it, and then be off. While the servant was walking around the crate wondering what was inside, the telephone would ring.

This would be Maxy, apologetic, anxious, smooth as silk, pretending to be an executive of the firm asking if the case had been delivered. Yes, it had. Oh, dear, how unfortunate and annoying—because a mistake had been made in addressing the crate and it was not intended for Mr. So-and-So at all. Regrettably, it was too late now to get the van men to collect it. Would it be terribly inconvenient if the crate stayed there for the night? The van men would pick it up first thing in the morning.

And, of course, Maxy's charm worked and it always was convenient. And inside the crate, of course, would be one of Maxy's men. He would stay there until the house settled down for the night, then he would unfasten the crate, come out, lift the items listed by Maxy, pack himself and the loot back in the crate, screw it up from inside, and the next morning be whipped away by the returning van men before any loss had been discovered by late-rising servants taking advantage of their employer's absence.

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Dog became Maxy's crate man—and he did the job well, no complaints, and made himself more money than he had seen for years. He even bought a new suit, got himself a haircut regularly, and began to bathe daily.

They did a couple of jobs in London, then worked the provincial towns for a few months, and finally came back to do another job in London. Maxy picked the house of a rich stockbroker who had a famous collection of gold and silver snuff-boxes for which Maxy knew the right market. Duly at half-past five, Dog was delivered—labeled *Fragile: Handle With Care*—to a house just off Hyde Park and dumped on the hall floor. A few minutes later, Dog heard the telephone ring and a servant answer it, and he knew that it was Maxy doing his stuff. The servant hung up, shuffled round the crate, gave it a nosey tap or two, and then moved away.

Dog sat inside and, an old hand now, patiently waited for time to pass. He used to amuse himself during this period by working out the possibilities from mating one breed of dog with another. On this particular night he was working on the problem of crossing a Portuguese Water Dog and a Staffordshire Bull Terrier, and time flew.

Eventually a clock in the hall struck midnight. Dog opened his thermos, had a cup of tea and a sandwich, and then, slipping on his gloves, he began to unscrew the crate. Five minutes later he was out.

There was one shaded light burning at the foot of a curving marble stairway and the hallway was hung with tapestries and pictures. Dog brushed himself down, tidied his new haircut, and proceeded to work. He was well briefed on the layout. He went across the hall and into a study. In a little burglar-proof glass case was the collection of snuff-boxes.

Dog fixed the alarm and lifted the snuffboxes, wrapping each one carefully in tissue paper, and putting the lot into a velvet cloth bag. It was no more than twenty minutes' work. He went back to the crate and dropped his cloth bag into it. He was just about to get inside himself when a noise from the marble stairway made him turn round. The noise was a familiar, almost beloved one to him. It was the first low inquiring growl of an Alsatian demanding an invitation card or else.

Coming slowly down the stairs was a plumpish, rosy-cheeked woman of about thirty-odd, her dark hair done up in curlers, wearing a faded purple dressing gown. Dog put her down as a housekeeper or a cook. At her side was a large black Alsatian with a small white spot on its forehead, and Downey placed the dog immediately. Once he'd seen a dog he never forgot it, and he recognized this as one of the litter he had stolen a few months before.

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Recognizing the dog took some of the apprehension out of Downey. At least, he would have no trouble there. This was Sarah whom he personally had trained. He blessed the coincidence which had placed this particular Alsatian in this house.

The woman, without a word, came slowly down the stairs and across to Dog, staring at him with a far-away, puzzled look—as though she couldn't believe her eyes. The dog kept close to her side.

Dog Downey, always polite to women, and rather pleased that this one hadn't winced at the sight of his face, said, "Good evening, ma'am."

"Gooda evening. You looka for something?"

Now Dog Downey was no fool. Here was the cook or the housekeeper and from her voice he guessed that she was Italian, and Dog knew that all foreigners were simple souls when it came to understanding English ways.

"That's right, ma'am," he said. "I was passing and just dropped in to see Mr. Whitlow. Old friend of mine." Whitlow was the name of the stockbroker who owned the house.

The woman nodded and said, "Issa good of you, Signore—but Signor Vitlow, not here tonight."

"A pity. I thought we might have a noggin together."

"Noggin—whata that?"

"A drinka . . ." Dog made the motion of drinking and felt completely relaxed. The dog he could deal with—and the woman was a simple Italian who would believe anything. All he had to do was to keep things nice and friendly, take care of the woman somehow, and get out of the house with the snuff-boxes. There could be no waiting for the crate to be collected in the morning—not this time.

"A drinka . . ." The woman smiled. "I show you. Thissa way."

She turned and went across to the back of the hall, the dog at her side cocking an inquiring eye at Downey who followed. A few moments later they were both at a table in the servants' sitting room with some bottles of beer in front of them.

"You're the cook here?" asked Downey.

"Thassa right. Only one month I come from Milano."

"I come from the Old Kent Road—I know what it's like to be in a strange place without friends," said Downey. "Here, let me fix that." He reached out for the beer and glasses and began to prepare the drinks.

Now it should be explained at this point that, although Downey had changed his line of operations, like a true professional he would never have dreamt of going outside his own house without all the adjuncts of a dog snatcher. After all, who could tell at what moment opportunity might not knock in the shape of a pedigreed Doberman Pinscher looking for a new owner. Downey always carried a knockout pill which could be fed to, say, a

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reluctant Great Dane. He fished now in his pocket for the pill and slipped it into the woman's drink. In five minutes she would drop off and Dog could safely depart—with the loot.

It must be said for Downey that he didn't like doing it to a woman. He was the last man to treat any woman like a dog—but it had to be done. He raised his glass and she drank with him, and his conscience troubled him. She was such a nice soul, friendly, with big peach-bloom cheeks and a dreamy look in her eyes as though she were still in Italy among friends who loved her, not here in cold, rainy London.

"*Birra*," she said, "very good. But *vino* issa better." As she put her glass down, she went on, "Tella me —you always weara gloves like that?"

Dog nodded. "Always." To leave fingerprints about in his work was like leaving a visiting card.

"Is very much gentleman to weara gloves. I lika that."

Dog nodded again, and then said, "What's your name?"

"Rosa," she said. "Rosa Caramaggio. Whassa your name?"

"Albert," said Dog truthfully, and then added untruthfully, "Brown."

"Issa nice. Alberto . . . Alber . . . Alb . . ." Her head began to drop and then with a last warm smile she flopped back into the wickerwork armchair and began to snore gently. Dog didn't mind the snoring. It always had that effect on dogs, too.

He sat and gave her a few moments, thinking to himself what a nice creature she was and how lucky he had been to meet someone so out of touch with the world of reality that she thought Mr. Whitlow's friends called long after midnight and got in without opening the front door.

When Rosa was sound asleep, Dog turned to deal with the Alsatian who, during all this, had been sitting between him and Rosa, awaiting instructions.

Dog didn't try to rush it. Relations had to be established again.

"Well, now, Sarah, me old darling. Nice to see you. Remember Dog? Remember your old daddy, Dog?"

Dog gave a low whistle and Sarah pricked her ears forward, cocked her head on one side, and was obviously making an effort at memory. Dog went on talking to her, giving her the dog patter of which he was a master. He had no doubts of winning Sarah over, and a few moments later, judging the time to be right, he started to stand up.

The first movement from him brought Sarah to all four feet. Her hackles went up and a growl came from her as though she were trying to imitate Etna in eruption. Dog sat down quickly. He was puzzled but not dismayed. He had not established complete recognition,

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that was all. He gave Sarah some more soft talk and she took it like a lady, relaxed, sitting back on her haunches.

But the moment Dog made another attempt to move, she was on her feet, hackles up again, and a row of fangs showing that would have sent Little Red Riding Hood into a dead faint. They did something for Dog Downey, too. They stimulated him to an effort of cerebration which finally gave him the answer.

Sarah clearly was having none of Dog's blandishments, and for a good reason that Dog now realized sadly. Dog had never been double-crossed by any of his dogs before and it was a blow. Sarah just didn't recognize him because he was wearing a new suit and had had his hair cut. He might talk like Dog Downey, but he didn't look like Dog Downey, and because of his new bathing habits he didn't smell like Dog Downey—and Sarah was taking no chances. So there was Dog stuck with the dog.

And in the armchair Rosa Caramaggio snored gently, smiling in her sleep. And there the whole matter might have rested until morning when the outside staff arrived—except that Fate, which can be as tricky as a terrier if you hand it the wrong word, decided that Dog had already had more luck than he deserved. Fate now decided to do a little hounding.

Sitting there, wondering what he could possibly do, and not dreaming of tangling with Sarah's fangs, Dog suddenly became aware of a burning smell. The door from the servants' sitting room into the kitchen was half open. Dog saw a trickle of blue smoke curling around the side of it like a lost genie looking for some wish to grant.

Instinctively he jumped to his feet, and instinctively Sarah was on hers and waiting for one more move. Dog sat down smartly and now he heard the faint whickering noise of flames. He had a situation on his hands. He could sit there and roast, and Sarah and Rosa would roast with him. But he would roast first because he was the nearest to the kitchen door.

Sweat breaking out on his ugly face, Dog decided that he would have to do something, no matter how desperate—a woman's life was at stake and that brought out all the Galahad in him. Behind him, in his chair, was a cushion. He carefully slipped it around and onto his knees. Sarah made no objection to movements performed while he sat. She just didn't like him on his feet.

Dog undid the fasteners on the cushion and pulled out the inner pillow. He put the pillow on his left arm and knotted it into place with his tie—ruefully, because the tie was new like his suit.

Then he looked Sarah straight in the eyes and said, "Okay, old lady, you asked for it, so it's going to be rough—for you, I hope, not for me."

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He leaned forward and opened another bottle of beer and poured it into a glass, while Sarah watched with interest. Then he suddenly jerked the beer into Sarah's face. At the same time he came to his feet and went for her, his padded left arm held in front of him like a shield.

Sarah lunged for him through a shower of pale ale, her fangs flashing and a battle growl rumbling in her throat. Her teeth went into the pillow and for a moment she hung from his arm. Dog jerked up his knee, slammed it into her unprotected belly, and Sarah went down in a heap.

In that moment Dog was on top of her and slipped the empty cushion cover over her head, twisting it tightly round her neck, muzzling and gagging her. He lifted her and ran quickly into the hall. Thanks to Maxy's briefing, he knew his way about the house as though he had lived there for years. By the front door was a small cloakroom. He kicked open the door, threw Sarah in, and then slammed the door shut on her.

He ran back across the hall, slipped on the marble tiling, slid five yards, cracked his head against the wall, and was a few seconds recovering. By the time he got back into the servants' sitting room, a great sheet of flame was roaring out through the kitchen door and little flames were flickering up and down the carpet and table cloth.

Dog grabbed Rosa, pulling her forward, and tried to lift her over his shoulder. But she was too heavy for Dog. He hadn't a hope of being able to carry her. So he did the next best thing. He slid her to the floor, grabbed her ankles, and, blinded and coughing from the smoke that now filled the place, he dragged her across the room on her back, out into the corridor, and along to the hall.

Dog stopped beside a small table with a telephone and hurriedly put through a call to the Fire Brigade. Then, with the fire roaring away in the kitchen and the servants' sitting room, he decided that it would not be safe to leave Rosa in the hall. He tried the front door but this was locked and no key was visible. But next to the door he found a pair of French windows leading to a side garden.

He put his shoulders to these and burst them open. Then he went back, took his velvet bag from the crate, grabbed Rosa by the ankles, and dragged her into the garden. She would be quite safe there.

His duty done, all his chivalrous instincts satisfied, Dog now began to think of himself. He didn't want to be around when the fire engine arrived, and he didn't want to set off through the night streets of London carrying a bag of swag. Any policeman just seeing Dog out so late would stop him on general principles. So Dog thrust the bag deep into the heart of a little yew

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tree for subsequent collection and then took to his heels. Turning the corner of the street at a gallop, the inevitable happened—he ran into a policeman. The officer's hand shot out and grabbed Dog.

"Hullo, Dog—where are you off to in such a hurry?"

"Home," said Dog—without hope.

"Not tonight," said the policeman, confirming Dog's pessimism.

And Dog was taken to the station and booked for loitering with intent to commit a felony. His protest to the station sergeant that the last thing he was doing was loitering went unheeded.

Dog spent the night in a cell and was left kicking his heels and threatening the Habeas Corpus Act until eleven o'clock the next morning. Then he was hauled up in front of a Detective-Inspector, an old friend of his.

"Okay, Dog," said the Inspector, "you'd better come clean. The crate trick is finished and we want to know who is running it. Not you, because you haven't the brains."

"What crate trick?" asked Dog.

The Inspector sighed. "Last night it was worked on the house of a Mr. Whitlow. A collection of valuable snuffboxes is missing. Unfortunately for you a fire broke out while you were there, so you couldn't risk sitting in your crate and waiting for the usual morning collection. You broke out through the French windows—out, Dog, because the glass on the terrace and the way the catch was smashed prove it. Talk."

"I wasn't going to," said Dog innocently, "because I don't like being immodest—but I didn't do no such thing. I was walking down the street when I saw the glare of fire through the house windows. I went into the garden, found the French windows burst open—so I hopped in and telephoned for the Fire Brigade. Any responsible citizen would have done the same. Then I thought there might be someone about in danger, so—"

"So you rescued the cook, eh?"

"That's right. If anyone was pulling a crate job they must have done it before I arrived."

"Indeed? According to the police doctor this cook was given a knock-out pill. The kind used for dogs. She must have caught you on the job. You gave her the old malarkey—she's a simple soul—and then you took a glass of beer with her and slipped her the Mickey Finn."

"To a woman? I would never do such a thing!"

"We'll see—they have just brought her down for questioning. She'll recognize you."

Dog's heart sank. A few moments later Rosa Caramaggio was brought into the room, and Dog resigned himself to the inevitable.

The Inspector said to Rosa, "Have you ever seen this man before?"

Rosa looked at Dog and then shook her head. "Thissa man? No—I never see him."

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"Not in Mr. Whitlow's house last night?"

"No. Never see thissa man before. Issa nice man?"

"Not very," said the Inspector sharply. "But—listen. This is the man who saved your life last night when the fire broke out. But I want to know what happened *before* the fire—when you caught him in the house—"

"Is thissa the man who save me!" Rosa cried. "Is a *splendido* man! Rosa always grateful!" She came forward and embraced Dog fervently, and Dog, delighted, but not knowing why she was helping him, said over his shoulder to the Inspector, "She was sleeping heavily when I rescued her. Probably uses sleeping pills."

"Break it up," said the Inspector.

And that was it.

Try as he might, the Inspector simply could not shake Rosa. She had never seen Dog before, but her heart was overflowing with gratitude to him.

In the end the Inspector had to let Dog go, and off he went taking Rosa with him.

They walked down the road together to a small café and Dog ordered coffee and Chelsea buns; and while they waited for them, he gave Rosa a wink.

"You're a good un," he said. "Never seen me before. You should have seen the Inspector's face."

"But issa true," said Rosa.

Dog looked at her in amazement.

"But we had beer together in the sitting room. You came down the stairs with the dog—don't you remember?"

"No, I not remember."

"But," insisted Dog, "you came down with the dog. We had some beer and chat—"

"Oh!" Rosa put her hands to her mouth. "I dida that?"

"You certainly dida."

For a moment Rosa hesitated. Then leaning forward she said, "You keepa secret?"

"Anything for you, Rosa."

And then she explained that she was a confirmed sleep-walker, particularly when she had some worry on her mind, and that night she had gone to sleep worrying. In her sleep the answer to her worry had come. She had left some underclothes to dry in front of an electric fire in the kitchen. So she had sleep-walked downstairs to remove them for fear of fire and . . .

"When I walka like that, *caro mio*, I talka, drinka, do everything like awaka—but afterwards I remember nothings. Speaka me—you married man?"

"No," said Dog, gazing with reverence at this splendid creature who did not avert her eyes at the sight of his face. "Bachelor."

But it was a state that did not last for long. They were married and eventually they had a son called Angelo—which is another story and one you may or may not have heard.

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*a new story by*

**HENRY SLESAR**

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: HENRY SLESAR

TITLE: *The Horse That Wasn't for Sale*

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Carlin believed that a good Thoroughbred doesn't go crazy overnight; besides, he'd ridden horses with reputations far worse than Stargazer's . . .*

SHE HEARD THE TROUBLED WHINNY and the thud of hoof even before she was conscious of the automobile engine that had come to a halt in the driveway. Sitting in the shrouded room, its windows shuttered against the sun, Christine felt the first stir of an emotion other than apathy. Except for her father's lawyer, nobody knew she had arrived at the Farm. Curious, she waited for the expected footstep and the ringing of the doorbell.

It was a long time coming. In the stable, Stargazer snorted, expressing his own excitement. Suddenly, Chris realized what was delaying the visitor: he or she had made a stop at Stargazer's stall, sneaking a look at the famous killer horse . . . She found herself resenting the intruder, even without knowing who it was.

Finally it came. Not a ring, but a knock, blunt and demanding. She opened the door and saw a face that suited the sound.

"Hello, Miss Runyon," the face said cheerfully, gathering leathery creases in a smile. "You remember me, don't you? Allen Carlin?"

He took off a checkered alpine hat and pressed it against a brown suede vest. The man smelled of shaving lotion, tobacco, and horses —the way her father had always smelled. But there the resemblance ended.

"I didn't know anyone knew I was here," Chris said. "What can I do for you, Mr. Carlin?"



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"Well, you can start by letting me in," he said, with heavy charm. "Something I'd like to talk to you about."

She stood aside as he came in. He didn't even glance at the room, the sheeted furniture and rugless floor. He was too intent on his purpose, whatever it was, to feel the desolate aura of the house.

Then he sat down, crossed booted legs, and said, "Naturally, it was a shock to all of us when Will passed away. Tell you the truth, I've been keeping my eye out for you, Miss Runyon, just to make sure I got to you before anyone else. You've been gone quite a while."

"It's about three years," she said.

"Pity, isn't it? To see a place like the Farm go down the drain? Shame Will wasn't more careful about—well, you know, his finances."

"Are you really sorry for my father, Mr. Carlin?"

He frowned at the lining of his hat. "I guess you know we weren't exactly friends. We used to be once, before we got to be debtor and creditor. That's poison for a lot of friendships." He narrowed his eyes. "Some of those debts still aren't paid."

"They will be just as soon as the estate's settled. The Farm's already sold, you know."

"Yes, I know. You never did have much interest in the place, did you?"

"I'm married, Mr. Carlin." She couldn't help the reprimanding tone. "My husband's work in in Washington, and that's where I live."

"Yes, of course." He paddled thick fingers against the arm of the chair. "I bought quite a few of your father's stock at the auction. Might have ended up with all of them, if I hadn't run out of money. A lot of fine animals."

"I'm sure you made good buys," Chris said.

"Oh, I'm not complaining. Except for one little detail. The horse I really wanted wasn't for sale."

In the darkness of the room there was something malevolent about the man's face. Chris went to a window and raised a blind quickly, slanting light across his eyes and making him wince. His smile flickered for a moment, and then restored itself.

"I suppose you think I believe that story about Stargazer," he said. "No, Miss Runyon, I've been around horses all my life. A good Thoroughbred doesn't go crazy overnight. Even the best of 'em can have an accident now and then—but that's only high spirits. So any compunction you might have about selling Stargazer—"

"I'm afraid you're mistaken," she said sharply. "Stargazer was kept out of the auction at my request. He's my horse and I didn't want him sold."

"I was at the inquiry, you know," Carlin said. "I listened to every word, and you know what I think? I think Burnett mistreated that ani-

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mal, that's why he got stomped—"

"Mr. Burnett was a fine trainer."

"Yes, yes, no use going over all that again. The point is that I'm willing to take my chances, Miss Runyon, and I won't ask you to cut the price just because of the horse's bad reputation."

"There's no price tag on him, Mr. Carlin. I'm sorry."

His ragged gray brows met.

"I don't get it. You don't really mean to keep him, do you? Not if you can get a fair deal? You told me that you live far away—"

"Washington's quite a horsy town, Mr. Carlin—you'd be surprised. I'm fond of Stargazer and I mean to take care of him." She hesitated. "For one thing, I mean to make sure that he's never ridden again."

"Well, that's a waste, isn't it? A fine horse like that? Why, he'd be a prize winner in any—"

"I won't let him be ridden again, Mr. Carlin."

"You really think he'd stomp anybody who mounted him?"

"Perhaps."

"Miss Runyon, are you telling me you got a mad horse out there in the stable?"

Chris sighed, and stood up. "I have nothing more to say about it. If you don't mind, Mr. Carlin, there's a lot I have to do."

"You're still a sporting woman, aren't you?" He grinned up at her. "Would you be willing to make a little wager?"

"Really, I—"

"No, hear me out. You see, I don't believe that cockeyed story, not for a minute. I've ridden horses with reputations five times worse than Stargazer's, and I can assure you—"

"I don't want to discuss it any further!"

"I can ride him, Miss Runyon. If I prove it to you, will you then talk about a sale?"

"No!"

He laughed. "You're your father's daughter, all right—anybody can see that. Everybody said Will ought to raise mules, that it would have been more in character. Look, you don't have to worry about me. I was born in a saddle. If anything happens, the responsibility will be all mine—"

She whirled on him, her skirt whipping about her knees.

"Your responsibility? Do you really think I care what happens to *you*?"

Carlin blinked, and Chris tried to swallow her anger.

"I didn't mean that. I don't want to see you hurt, Mr. Carlin, but it's not you I'm thinking about. You said you were at the inquiry. All right, then you know what it means if Stargazer—hurts anyone else. They'll destroy him, they'll have the legal right to put him away. I can't let that happen."

"But it won't happen!"

"It will! There's something wrong with Stargazer, I've known it for a

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long time. He wasn't bred at the Farm, you know—Father bought him when he was a colt. The man he bought him from, I don't even remember his name, he mistreated that animal so badly—"

She sank back into the chair. "Father bought him for me, because I thought I could win Stargazer over—with kindness . . . I was a lot younger then, and I credited kindness with greater powers than I do now. He responded, he became gentle, well-mannered; and he was a beautiful horse to ride, of course, I never knew a horse with such—style. But then he changed. You're right about Burnett, of course. He was a good trainer, but he was impatient, sometimes cruel. I suppose that's why Stargazer did what he did, why he tried to kill him . . ."

Chris looked up, her eyes pleading for understanding. "But Stargazer hasn't been the same since. He's all right until you mount him, until he feels that hateful weight on his back . . . He *is* a killer horse, Mr. Carlin. But in a barn, or grazing in a pasture, he's—just Stargazer."

She felt tears on her face. The thought of the man in the other chair, watching her, seeing her like this, made her feel naked.

"Please go," she said. "I don't want to talk any more."

He rose slowly. He looked down at her, slapping his alpine hat from one hand to the other. Then he went to the door, his boot heels loud on the uncovered floor.

She didn't stir until the door closed behind him. Then she got up and went to lower the blind once more, feeling obliged to keep the room dim, to keep the house in mourning.

There was still work to do, of course. There was the melancholy labor of cataloguing the few possessions her father had left. There were decisions to be made, and people to call; but she felt lifeless, enervated. Outside, she heard Stargazer neigh, and that reminded her of her most urgent chore. She went to her father's desk, and rummaged for the telephone number of the van company that would transport the stallion to his retirement in Washington.

Then—hoofbeats!

The sound was so unexpected that she froze with alarm. She remembered that the stall door had been latched, but not locked. There hadn't been any need to lock it—

She ran to the door, flung it open, and cried out in rage and fear. The dry earth had been stirred into a powdery mist, and the hoofs of Stargazer were drumming on the path leading over the hill and into the woods. She screamed the horse's name, as if the animal itself would understand its danger and ignore the knowing tug at its reins, turn of its own volition and come back.

Then Chris began to run, wasting breath with shouts that couldn't be heard. "Stargazer!" she shouted. "Mr. Carlin, please! Bring him back, please!"

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When horse and rider were out of sight, she stopped. She put her hands to her face and sobbed, but only for a moment. It was better to do something than stand on a dusty road and cry; she held her skirts clear, and ran back to the house.

Carlin's car was still in the driveway, its key in the ignition; hers was in the garage, behind closed doors. That made the choice easy. She climbed behind the unfamiliar wheel, made a quick, nervous study of the instrument panel and found it—thank God—familiar enough. Park, Reverse, Neutral, Drive—she turned the key, put her foot on the gas pedal, making the sedan bolt forward.

She had always been a timid driver, more at ease in a saddle than on the car seat. But now she drove heedlessly, accelerator on the floor, ignoring the jolts and bumps of the road as she sped toward the horizon line where horse and rider had vanished.

There was still no sign of them when the road became a forest trail. She stopped the car, and turned off the engine.

The woods were dark and cool, a pleasant sanctuary from the bright mid-afternoon sun.

Chris listened, and heard nothing more than woodland sounds. A light wind shuffled the leaves, and a bird gave an inquisitive whistle.

Where had Carlin gone?

Then she heard the stallion's whinny.

"Stargazer!" she called.

She got out of the car, sloughing through last year's dead leaves in the direction of the whinny, trying to keep her feet from entanglement in creepers and broken branches.

Then she saw Stargazer, standing quietly between two tall poplars, a shaft of sunlight falling on its proud mane.

She ran toward him joyfully, not thinking of the empty saddle on his back.

"Stargazer . . ."

The stallion pawed the ground at her approach, its head bobbing. Chris looked down and saw Carlin on the forest floor, flat on his back, with one arm thrown across his face. She gasped, but not in surprise, for this was what she had expected; this was the penalty Carlin had to pay for his arrogance.

But she came closer, and saw that the penalty had been nothing less than death.

"Oh, God," Chris whispered. "God, how could you let it happen . . ."

There was no need to search for throb of pulse or exhalation of breath. Stargazer hadn't been content with throwing his hated burden. His hoofs had shattered ribs, broken the hand that had been raised in defense, bruised and battered the skull.

Chris averted her eyes. The stallion came toward her, the attack already forgotten, and nuzzled her shoulder, begging for a caress.

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"Damn you, Carlin!" she said.

She patted the stallion, and looked sadly into the liquid brown eyes.

"My poor Stargazer. You don't know what you've done, do you?"

No, Chris thought. Nobody knows. Not yet. But when they did, there would be only one decision possible about Stargazer's fate.

But nobody knew. *Not yet.*

She caught her breath, and forced herself to look at the body. What if she simply left it here? Left it to last year's dead leaves, and this year's concealing foliage? By the time they found Carlin, Stargazer would be in Washington, safely grazing . . .

But the hoofmarks were there to be read. They would come for the stallion, and she would have to explain what she had done, and why. Not only to them, but to her husband . . .

No, she couldn't leave Carlin here, not with the story of his death so clearly marked on the body.

But she could do something else. What if the story of his death were obscured? Better still, obliterated? It would take an experience even more brutal to hide the awful evidence of Stargazer's insane fury. An accident so damaging . . .

The answer was obvious. She looked at Carlin's automobile, and then at Carlin himself. He was a big man, well over six feet, and sturdily built. Could she drag his dead weight into the car?

There was only one way to find out. Try. She put her arms under Carlin's shoulders and dragged him a few inches along the ground. The leaves beneath him helped ease the friction, but she found the effort exhausting.

She rested a moment, and tried again.

On the third attempt the dead man was propped against the side of the car.

Somehow she managed to get the body into the front seat. As she climbed in beside him, she was too exhausted even to feel revulsion.

Stargazer, his reins secured to the limb of a tree, watched mournfully as the car drove off.

Chris reached Leap Canyon ten minutes later. The State highway authorities had posted the steep highway with sign after sign warning of its dangers. Not many cars traveled the route, and there were none on it now. Chris regarded the empty road as a good omen, a sign from heaven declaring her to be in the right.

At the beginning of a steep grade she stopped the car and leaned back against the seat with a sigh. It had to be done, she told herself. It made no difference to Carlin now—the dead couldn't care. If his ghost had more decency than the man himself, he would recognize the justice of what she was doing.

She put the parking brake down, and shifted the stick into Drive. Then, her heart pounding, she

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stepped carefully out of the automobile, holding the door open. With her other hand she released the parking brake and jumped back.

There was no need to push the car even a fraction of an inch. Gravity became her confederate. The car started forward, gathering speed quickly, its opened door slamming shut with the force of the wind against it. In a straight line the momentum carried the car toward the guard rail, straight for the precipice on the other side.

For one terrible moment Chris was afraid the rail would hold, that Carlin's bruised body would remain poised over the brink . . .

But the impact was too great. The guard rail gave way, and Carlin, his car, and his damning wounds flew over the edge. The crash below was like an explosion.

It seemed to take a long time for the reverberations to end.

Chris waited for the beginning of silence, and then started back for home. It would be a long walk, but she was grateful for it. She wanted to be tired out, too exhausted to think, to do anything but sleep the waking nightmare away.

She had just fallen on the bed and felt the first sweet symptom of approaching oblivion when the knock came at the door. She sat up, bewildered by the sound, and looked out of the window to see the sun blood-red behind the hills.

She opened the door, and the tall, gangling figure looked down at her, his thumbs hooked in the loops of his dusty trousers. There was a half-inch gap between his front teeth.

"Ma'am?"

"What is it?" Chris said.

"My name's Sam Fryatt," the stranger said shyly. "From the Algonquin Stables? I guess you don't know me—I just started workin' for Mr. Carlin a short time ago."

"What do you want?"

"You're old Will Runyon's daughter, ain't you? Lot of talk around here about your Pa."

She started to push the door shut, but he held it open.

"Didn't mean nothin' personal," he said apologetically. "I just come over here on account of what happened—out there in the canyon, I mean. You see, I thought I recognized Mr. Carlin's car, only I wasn't sure." He grinned. "I guess anybody'd have a hard time recognizing it now, huh?"

She stared, and the widening of her eyes must have told him what he wanted to know. If he had only guessed before, he was sure now. He stepped inside boldly, and pushed the door shut behind him.

"It was an accident," Chris said hoarsely. "The brakes—"

Fryatt chuckled. "I was in the canyon," he said. "Takin' a ride on the old nag they let me use at the Algonquin. I seen that car stop up there, and just for the heck of it I put my field glasses on it. That's how I came to see it all."

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"But you don't understand *why* I did it," Chris said desperately. "If you'll let me explain—"

"Heck, I don't care why you did it. I never much liked him myself." He clicked his tongue. "Sure could sit a horse, though, couldn't he?"

"I didn't kill him! He was already dead when—"

"When you pushed him off the road? Sure, I guess you knew what you were doin', ma'am. I don't blame you none, everybody around here says Mr. Carlin treated your Pa pretty bad—"

"That's not the reason!"

"You don't think I'd turn you *in* or anything, do you?"

Chris searched the bony, sallow face to find the deeper meaning of his words. The man's weary eyes told her nothing, but the smile was insinuating.

"I didn't kill him," she whispered. "You *must* believe me."

"Heck, I believe you, all right. Only if they come around and ask me questions—"

Yes, Chris thought. Sam Fryatt would have answers for them, answers that would be accusations. And what would she say in her defense? That she had been covering the traces of a killer horse?

"'Course, I been thinkin' about quittin' the Algonquin for some time now, so maybe I won't even be *around* when they start askin' questions. You know what I mean?"

"What?" Chris said blankly.

"I figure on leavin' the state, just as soon as I get a stake together. I won't need much—maybe three, four hundred dollars. If you could help me out, maybe—"

She didn't say the evil word that came to her mind.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I don't have any money, Mr. Fryatt, I can't be any help to you."

"Heck, you just had a big horse auction—"

"The money went to pay my father's debts. The sale didn't even bring enough to do that."

He looked glumly around the room. "Must be *something* worth money, ma'am. A man like your Pa don't die and leave his child nothing at all."

"Yes," Chris said. "There's one thing he did leave me. The most valuable thing he owned."

"What's that?"

"It's a horse, Mr. Fryatt. His name is Stargazer, and he's a Thoroughbred, a champion."

"You mean that stallion out there?" Fryatt's eyes glowed. "A man would be mighty proud to own a horse like that, ma'am."

"Yes," Chris said dreamily.

She went to her father's desk and drew up the paper that made the transfer legal. In the stable, Stargazer whinnied and stomped his hoofs, and Sam Fryatt looked up with a grin at the sound.

He left the house five minutes later, anxious to take possession, eager for one final ride of the day before the sun went down.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **WILLIAM FAY**

TITLE: ***The Judge Was a Hero***

TYPE: Cop Story

LOCALE: 20 miles from New York City

TIME: 1932 and 1954

COMMENTS: *Certain writers have a special knack—no, it's more than that, it's a real talent—for writing the tug-at-your-heart, glow-in-your-eyes cops-and-robbers story: Bill Fay is surely one of the best . . .*

JUDGE DENEHEE COULD ALLOW HIS lovely wife and his nasty chest cold only ten days of Florida's warmth because a crowded and unattended court calendar always disturbed his conscience too greatly. And the first night he was home, in a suburb of New York, he received a phone call from an influential friend who had been disturbing his conscience for twenty-two years.

"I'll be down right away," he said, then put up the phone.

Helen asked him reasonably, "Who was that on the phone?"

"An influential friend."

"What influential friend?"

"Vince," Judge Denehee said. "He's had some trouble down at the diner. He didn't say what kind."

"Then why doesn't he call a cop? It's eleven o'clock at night. You're supposed to have been ailing."

"Well, I think it's about the new place he expects to open on the Thruway, dear. Vince gets all tangled in the legalities."

"He gets tangled?" Helen sighed, raising her brows, and it was, unfortunately, an attitude that became her. "Darling, you would think that we were going into the hamburger business. What does Vince have on you, anyhow?"

"You wouldn't understand," he said. "No woman in the world would understand."

"I can tell you there are some things I understand. Putting up

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your money as a security bond for him. Making speeches about his virtues to every politician we know. Practically bribing the state of New York to give him preference over those other people."

"The McGorky brothers?"

"Whatever their names."

"Vince is a better man than they are. They might even be thieves. Besides, all they've got is money."

"That's something you won't have for very long," he was reminded. "Am I stupid in supposing you've already done enough for Vince?"

"No, dear, just uninformed."

The judge left his car close to the roadside diner known as VINCE's, a sufficient designation for as many years as most people could remember. There wasn't much business this time of night when the interstate traffic was running eastbound to New England—Springfield, Worcester, Fall River, Boston, Portland. Vince usually caught the bulk of his business on the westbound run, when New York was only twenty miles away, when the boys were low and their hunger was high. Then they could sprawl and relax and do it right, with the added privilege of listening to Vince, an elaborately talkative man.

Denehee looked up to see how the moon hung fat and yellow over everything tonight, spilling its light on the old road, frisking the shadows, letting you see the parallel path of the new superroad they called the Thruway, a stretch of engineering magic without perceptible dip or turn. All but completed now, the Thruway was designed to take away the burden and the roaring and the fuming of the trailer trucks that were currently choking traffic in a hundred towns along old No. 1. It was what a lot of people liked to call the "end of an era"; yet to Denehee it meant, more specifically, the end of Vince's place.

The ham-and-egg fillings for two sandwiches were doing nicely on the grill and two truck drivers were waiting for them. A young cop got up quickly from his seat at the counter and said, "Good evening, Judge," as though it might be wrong to be found here eating doughnuts on the township's time.

"Take it easy, Ed," Denehee said to the cop. "How's the family?"

"They're fine, sir, thank you."

The young cop's name was Farnsworth—a nice boy, Denehee thought. Vince came in then from the rear addition to the diner, holding a quantity of soft rolls in the fold of his apron. He was about fifty years old and not much bigger than a fifteen-cent cigar. He opened and lowered his apron so that the rolls ran into a large wooden drawer. He shook hands with Denehee.

"Joey, boy," he said, then very softly, "the McGorky boys were here. They were abusive, I can tell you. We will talk when these guys are gone."

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The judge watched Vince put the ham-and-egg sandwiches together and draw two coffees with stylish speed. The judge was not gravely concerned with the McGorky brothers, two entrepreneurs who owned a bowling alley, a quantity of money, and a surplus of personal brass. Vince set things down in front of the drivers, then walked back, looking at Farnsworth, the youthful officer of the law.

"You don't have to worry about the judge," Vince said. "He used to push a 'cycle up and down this road himself."

"I guess we all know that," the policeman said respectfully.

"The judge was a hell of a fellow," Vince said, and Denehee thought: *Here we go again.* "Back in—well, 'Thirty-one, was it? 'Thirty-two?"

"They still talk about it in the department," Farnsworth said. He was a young man willing to please.

"Vince," said Denehee. He spoke appealingly. "Would you mind laying off tonight?"

But Vince's attention was on the drivers, who had been eating peacefully, making no comments. "You think I'm making it up?" Vince demanded. They had not said anything. "Would you like to ask the judge himself?"

They didn't ask, but their interest had been heightened. They sat listening to Vince and there was not much Denehee could do except walk around the counter and draw himself a cup of coffee.

"The judge was a hero," Vince was saying. "It happened right here in this place. He was studyin' his law books, in the second booth from the door, right there. That was before I got the booths upholstered. He had his 'cycle parked in the back, so these guys comin' in couldn't see it."

Denehee sipped at his coffee. He knew how Vince could get. A faithful servant to the truth, he was prone to certain colorations where his affections were involved. While he talked, he kept chopping onions on a wooden board, the habit of work being the only thing as natural to him as the habit of talk. There was a scar on his right arm, just above the elbow. But it was not because the scar was unpretty that Denehee wished the little man would wear long sleeves. It was because the sight of the scar had always managed to stir up his sense of indebtedness—even as Vince's narrative right now was rattling a skeleton known only to the judge . . .

It had happened in '32, in case Vince wasn't sure. That much of the story the judge could have unerringly supplied. He knew this for certain, because it was later in the same year he had passed his bar examinations and been admitted to practice. As someone had said, admittance to the bar at that time was roughly equal to a license to starve. And it might have been, too,

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except that his citation for gallant service as a cop on Route No. 1 was so fresh in mind that many people were impatient to reward him.

He was granted some helpful receiverships by county judges who were impressed with him, and just about the time that Roosevelt closed the banks in 1933, he was given a county job, by the Republicans, no less. Those were great days to be on a payroll, Denehee could tell you.

Hamburgers, for instance, that had been selling at Vince's for a dime, were two for fifteen cents the night that Denehee became a hero. And there were no restrictions on the quantity of onions or catsup any customer chose to consume. Pie was a nickel, and the juke box, Vince's first one, was a dazzling innovation. It played six records: *Star Dust*, *Rhapsody in Blue*, and some others that Denehee had since forgotten. It was Vince who put in most of the nickels, anyhow, keeping the volume down, if the two of them were there alone; and especially so, if Joe had his head in a book.

The cops worked longer in 1932—same eight-hour shifts, but more of them, with a little juggling of schedules to accommodate a motorcycle man, age twenty-five and married (two kids), in the last semester of his studies at Fordham Law.

You got tired, all right. Sometimes, as Denehee remembered, he would open the 'cycle's throttle wide for no better reason than the brief exhilaration it provided, for the needle it gave the senses when you were fighting sleep along Route No. 1.

The year '32, of course, was not a million years ago. Good times or bad, there was never an end to commercial hauling on the main line to New England. Here and there a brawl would blossom and Denehee would handle it well enough. He was young and very healthy. His confidence was unblunted.

It was cold the night he became a hero. It was late in March and the night was clear. There were little clumps of soiled and porous snow still frozen on the shoulders of the road. The eastbound traffic was running fairly big, but it was not yet time for Vince's real trade. Denehee, cold and hungry, had felt entitled to a half hour off the road. He was wearing the hip-length coat with the mouton collar, the beaver hat, the goggles, the leather gauntlets.

He left his motorcycle in back of Vince's place and brought his case book in with him. His goggles clouded as usual from the steam inside the diner. He told Vince he would like a couple of eggs, with the toast done medium brown.

"Shoot the thirty cents?" Vince said.

"That's right. The French fries too."

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He took off the gauntlets and rubbed his hands. He stamped his feet because they were cold. His feet hurt on the hard tile from the thumping; the sawdust flecked the fine shine on his shoes.

He took off his cartridge belt, with the .38 still in its holster, the whole thing hanging heavy in his hands. He hitched it all on a hook inside the second booth, to the left as you came in; then he took off the coat with the mouton collar and hung that up.

He felt very good, but not like studying law, except that the discipline of odd-moment study was fixed in him and rarely violated, with less than three months to go for the bar examinations.

"A priest and his breviary," Denehee said. "That's me." He pietistically thumped his chest. "Anything for the wife and kids."

"That's what you said last night."

"I'll say it again."

"Where were we last night?" Vince asked.

Joe Denehee looked at him, not understanding.

"Levine versus Levine," Vince said. "You were readin' it from the book. The partnership. The hairdressin' firm in Buffalo. Who win it—Aaron or Albert?"

"Albert," Joe said.

Vince seemed disturbed. "There was no appeal?"

"The appellate division turned Aaron down."

"You mean he got nothin'? Not the dame? Not the store? Not the dough?"

"Not even a little tonic for his scalp," Joe said, "or a manicure, after all his years in the shop."

He had been worried that night to find his sympathies more with Aaron and Vince than with the Court of Appeals. He was worried that he might not have a truly legal mind. Yet he respected Vince's amateur conclusions. The cases from the book lived vividly for Vince. They gave him a hook for the hanging of thought through a lot of quiet hours.

Joe was studying the "People versus R. J. Fullam," and trying not to get it stained with egg. He ordered another portion of French fries because he liked to dip them carefully in catsup and consume them one by one. This was when the crisis of his police career arrived.

His recollection was that he happened to look up and there were these two men. One of them wore a Chesterfield coat and a derby hat. The other wore a bulky tweed coat. His felt hat was not a memorable one. They both had guns. The derby looked well on the man who wore it. His features were handsome and austere, as befits the right face for a derby. His eyes looked crazy.

"Hello, bluejay," the man in the derby said. He was gazing directly at Denehee. "Sit still, bluejay." Joe had never seen the man before, but it was not difficult to understand that his contempt for cops was

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classic. "Easy, easy, bluejay," he said, while the other man went for the cash drawer.

That's how it was. There was never any question in Denehee's mind about the wisdom of being docile. He could not have reached his gun without a deliberate grab for it. He did not want an Inspector's funeral with slow, proud music half so much as he wished to remain alive. It always distressed him that he had thought less of Helen and the kids at that moment than he had of his bar exams.

"That's a good bluejay."

The shame rose scaldingly, but Denehee did not attempt to move. His hands were as still as the print on the pages of the "People versus R. J. Fullam" when Vince threw a pan of French-fry fat into the face of the man who wore the derby.

The shriek of pain and the wild shot from the gun were simultaneous. The man in the tweed coat fired at Vince, but he did not have a clean shot at Denehee, with the new juke box and the phone booth blocking his view.

Then Denehee had the .38 and was on the floor of the booth, under the table, shooting several times, very deliberately, into as much as he could see of the Chesterfield coat and the screaming, scalded man within it. He remembered how the derby fell first to the tiling, then the body.

Denehee came out of it, all rage and bravery, stepping over the dead man. Vince, in back of the counter, was bleeding. The man in the tweed coat was already running.

"It's only my arm," Vince said. "That's all it is. You don't have to stay with me. You can still get him, Joe."

Denehee knew that he had started the chase with bold resolution. The man in tweed fled east on No. 1 in a low-slung car of a make not on the market any more. The fugitive drove with his lights off, in the mistaken belief he would be more difficult to follow. Actually the brightness of the night disclosed the car very clearly in its dull singularity; whereas, with lights on there would have been some chance of its blending with other cars and confusing Denehee.

The motorcycle, racing full out, was a little faster than the car. Joe had the barrel of his .38 shoved into the top of his right leather legging. He was wearing only his sweater and the flannel blouse beneath it, but he could not say that he was conscious of the cold, except for his hands. It was the lack of goggles and the flood of the wind that troubled him more. The swell of tears had blurred his vision and he was suddenly in danger of capsizing the motorcycle, of killing himself on the road. He began to think more of Helen and the kids. Or had they been, as he had so often suspected since, his only available excuse?

Because temptation had ridden

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tandem with his rising fear on No. 1. *Slow down,* it said; *you've done enough. He's got a gun and he won't hesitate to blow your brains out when you're close enough. There's a long and good life waiting for the Denehees. Take one shot at him, then knock off. Slow the 'cycle, make it skid, and then jump free of it. Let the damned thing crash, if you have to, but take one shot for the record.*

That was his own decision, as Denehee recalled it . . . twenty-two years ago.

He knew there wasn't much to be done about it in the spring of 1954. The enduring legend of his bravery could be sabotaged by no one but himself. He could see them now, the two truck drivers and the cop—all open-mouthed, all eager clients of Vince's favorite story.

One of the drivers asked, "What happened then?"

Vince leaned closer. "I'll tell you this: I wasn't there. I am here in the diner with a hole in my arm, and I'm lucky it's not in my head. I guess I threw them potatoes, in the first place, because I knew the judge'd get me out of it."

"On the road," the driver asked impatiently. "What happened on the road?"

"Well, the judge won't tell you himself. The fact is eight or ten people see him ride up Number One like he is Tom Mix with two carburetors on the one horse. He don't have his goggles. He don't have his coat. They are chasin' through Mamaroneck an' the guy tries to make a left turn, off of Number One. That's when Joey—I mean the judge here—takes him with one shot. Boffo! That's all. The car goes through the plate-glass window of a bank . . . How about it, Judge?"

Denehee didn't comment, but it was true; it had been the greatest dividend of wild luck ever collected, as far as Denehee could see. But the core of his distress, after twenty-two years, was the one unanswered question: *Wouldn't I have faked it, anyhow? Wouldn't I have taken some easy way out, if the bullet had not gone home?*

"Modest, that's all," Vince said in explanation of the great man's silence. "Inside of three years of that night he was an assistant district attorney of the county. Sittin' right there, Joseph Francis Denehee. When people come in an' the judge is here, I say one thing. Don't monkey with dynamite, I say; don't clown with class."

"Vince, lay off," Denehee advised him. "Go stick your head in the freezer."

The little man laughed. "You see what I mean? He talks plain language too. A democratic feller when the occasion calls. Well, that's all, gentlemen. Hit the road."

The drivers shook hands with Denehee, but the young cop, Farnsworth, lingered. He took a long time brushing his coat and continued

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to hang around. He was tall and lanky, filling the uniform like an unpadded set of stilts. He seemed impossibly youthful for a married man.

"Well, Eddie?" Denehee said.

"I wanted to ask your advice about something—it's kind of personal, sir." Young Farnsworth kept looking up at the white clock on the wall, an item unduly stained because it was too close to the ventilator. "I think I'd better get back on the road. The lieutenant might come along. Would you mind if I stopped by the house some night?"

"Any time, Eddie. Any time at all."

They watched him go, ducking his head beneath the door frame. Vince loosened and took another tuck in his apron, so he wouldn't be walking on the edges of it. He shoved his cigarettes toward Denehee.

"The McGorkys were here," Vince said, "while you were away. That's why I phoned you tonight."

"That so?" Denehee observed Vince's solemn expression, but he could not avoid suspecting there would be more pride than gravity in what was coming. "What about the McGorkys?"

"They're not nice fellers, Joe. Either Arthur or Herm. I think they must of done somethin' besides run a bowlin' alley before they came to this town. They don't like me gettin' that concession on the Thruway."

"Get to the point, Vince. What did they say?"

"They said I should take back my bid, unless I liked to dress up in bandages. They said I am half a ghost already, and they would be glad to make me a real spook, if I don't lay off. I got to admit there might be some trouble, but did you know they were that tough, Joe?"

"I know very little about them."

*I know very little about them*, he reflected, *yet I have a funny feeling I will learn much more. Mr. Justice Denehee*, he thought, *fresh from a brawl at Vince's diner, was wearing black, especially around the eyes.* Such a thing would look nice in the papers. Helen would love it. You could save the clippings for Election Day. He prepared himself for whatever jolt was in store.

He said to Vince, "What did you do when they told you that?"

Vince, watching him, was uneasy. "Well, Joe, I think we should face it. This Arthur McGorky is kind of big, an' he keeps givin' me the finger in the ribs, real rude. Frankly, I am bruised from here to there."

Vince demonstrated how rude this one McGorky had been by drawing his hand from one side of his apron to the other.

"Tell it all, Vince. And with a little less mayonnaise. What did you do to Arthur McGorky?"

"I hit him with a grilled-cheese sandwich," Vince said quickly. "The grill an' all. I pulled out the extension cord an' I swung. I figure it

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cost me forty bucks to crack up that grill." Now Vince paused, seeking to appraise the effect of his remarks. "Of course, Herm McGorky was easy. A customer threw him out for me. Do you think I made a mistake, Joe?"

"I refuse to answer," said Denehee in all earnestness, "on the ground that it might tend to incriminate me."

"Of course, one trouble was that I forgot you were in Florida with the missus, Joe."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Well, I got all of a sudden brave. Do you know what I mean?" Vince's expression was cast in that durable glaze of auld lang syne. "Don't you know, Joe?"

And the trouble was that Denehee did. The legend of his personal valor grew healthier each year. Synthetic as he knew it to be, it was not less real to Vince or to common opinion. It had been the efficient springboard of his whole career, with events never quite disclosing that Vince, for all his hero worship, was the only real dragon slayer in the act.

That was what he owed to Vince, and what he could not explain to his wife. He lit one of Vince's cigarettes and accepted another cup of coffee.

"And what happens now?"

"I hear that Arthur and Herm don't take it so good," Vince said. "I hear they may send some people around. Real tough guys. Maybe pros."

"In this township?" said Denehee. "With the people you have behind you? Why, that's the wildest nonsense I ever heard."

His first glimpse of the intruders was their reflection in the gleaming surface of the coffee maker. They had come that silently. He had his own cup of coffee raised to his lips, the steam rising slowly.

When he turned on the stool to face them, they were in the place, the door having closed behind them. They were established and in charge. Only one of them had a gun.

"You," one said to Vince. "Come out from behind the counter."

"I'm in my slippers," Vince said. "I'm not fit to be seen. Why don't you talk to the judge?"

It was a great time for jokes, Denehee was thinking. Because they looked at him, and there was no indication they were impressed. The young men wore leather jackets and they looked squatly powerful. They would not be from this locality, he knew. These were hoodlums for hire—impersonal, amoral—he had seen enough of them, as a cop and as a judge, to know legitimate members of the trade.

*This is where I came in*, he was thinking, even as it was, by established tradition, the logical moment for Vince to hurl something edible and, of course, get shot again. Denehee knew very well that now was the time to buy back the years.

"Judge who?" the young man

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with the revolver requested. "This joker here?" He placed a hand against Denehee's chest and pushed him half off the stool. "Just get lost, mister. Go put a nickel in the juke, while we give the chef a treatment. The chef should not of been so full of muscles with some friends of ours last week." The young man's attention was now on Vince. "Hey, you!"

Denehee did it then. Of his own free will he launched the blow. He did not hear the anticipated gunfire, but a valid explosion went off in his head.

He kept swinging with great determination and no success. The young man, disdaining the use of his gun, just clubbed him one and the judge hit the floor.

It was a frustrating thing that made him aware of his years. He resolved then to get up and try again, but the other young man slugged him from behind.

Denehee's wits soared momentarily into the void of good intentions unfulfilled. Even so, when his senses cleared, he tried once more, and he was doing his own determined best when the two shots sounded. They were so rapid, so loud and so very close that Denehee fell back, no hero now—just a middle-aged and enlightened witness to a highly remarkable scene.

Officer Farnsworth was standing in the open door of the diner. A more valid hero and servant to duty you could not have flushed from a ton of comic books. One of his victims, shot through the wrist of his gun hand, was bent half forward in pain. The other young man held his arms aloft, his leather jacket hoisted too high for any contact with his pants.

"Eddie!" said Vince; and then, to the judge, "Hey, how do you like that boy?" Because Vince's faith in great men rising to great opportunities had never faltered. "Hey, Eddie! It's me! It's Vince!"

Officer Farnsworth, as the judge could see, was not ready to reply. His jaw muscles were jumping and his cheeks were the color of bleached bone. His hands were trembling.

*This is a hero?* Denehee asked himself, and his reason said, *Why not?* If it satisfied Vince, a connoisseur, who else had the right to complain?

Officer Farnsworth, just a bit unsteady now, sat on one of the counter stools, his .38 in fairly firm command. Denehee watched Vince gaze scornfully from one unhappy captive to the other.

"You guys were just lucky the judge is gettin' old," he said, "but we still got a lot of talent in this town. You—yeah, you." He addressed the injured one. "Lemme wrap up your wrist till the wagon gets here. Don't move, either one of you bums."

The judge got Farnsworth a cup of coffee and placed it on the counter for him. "Are you all right, boy?"

"Yes, sir. I hope I'm all right. I just feel kind of funny inside, like

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I swallowed a clock." Then very softly, to the judge alone, "You don't think I was scared, do you?"

Their eyes met and the two men smiled. The judge pushed the coffee forward. "Drink it down," he said. "Vince doesn't know the difference, and the department will be proud." After a while he said, "Before you call the stationhouse, Eddie—what made you come back here tonight?"

Farnsworth looked up, the color returning slowly to his cheeks. He took one of the cigarettes spilled on the counter and the judge struck a match for him.

"Thank you, sir." The .38 was now completely steady in his hand.

Denehee repeated, "What made you come back?"

"Well, I saw that your car was still outside," Farnsworth explained, "and I thought, 'Well, I'll ask him now, while he's still here.' I was wondering, sir—here's the one thing that's been on my mind—do you think I should study law?"

It was late when Denehee got home. He entered the bedroom quietly and saw that Helen had fallen asleep, although a lamp at her shoulder was still aglow. A book, place-marked, was resting on the coverlet.

He liked to look at her this way, with relaxed affection, reassured that she was probably the world's best-looking grandmother. He walked softly on the carpet, hoping not to disturb her. In the mirror of her vanity, he examined his swollen jaw.

"It's not bad," he said. "It's not bad at all."

*I threw the punch like this*, he was thinking; *all by myself and on my own initiative. What's the difference, anyhow, if I got knocked on my ear?*

"Joe," his wife said then.

He paused abruptly in his reenactment of the effort he had made at Vince's place. With one foot in the air he resembled a startled stork.

"Yes, dear?" he said.

She was sitting up, watching him. She looked amused, but also just a little worried.

"Drinking?"

"Yes, ma'am." He lowered his leg "Three cups of coffee and a doughnut."

"That makes you leap in mid-air? At half-past two in the morning?" She got up from bed and put on a negligee. "Are you really all right?"

"Yes, ma'am. Except that I'm a very strange fellow. A particular friend of Vince's."

"Look, darling," she said, approaching him. "I like Vince—really I do. But as I've asked so often—what power does he have over you?"

"None whatever, at the moment," the judge said truthfully. "I think he's got a new boy."

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## DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

*This is the 263rd "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . The author was a senior at Washington and Lee University, majoring in Journalism, when he wrote "The Man With the Attaché Case." He aimed the flashlight of his imagination at a certain event and let the beam play—but read the story and judge for yourself the author's blend of the factual and the fictitious . . .*

*Following graduation in June 1963, the author plans "to spend a year or more in France in pursuit of his goal"—to write—"and perhaps to visit the Basque country whence my name and family originate." During the summer of 1962 he and two friends "drove a Volkswagen into the jungles of Mexico's Yucatan [seeking the answer to the disappearance of Ambrose Bierce?] and miraculously made it all the way to a small island in the Caribbean" . . . all excellent background and experience for a budding writer. What other tales will he have to tell us soon?*

# THE MAN WITH THE ATTACHÉ CASE

*by N. CASHATT MONSARRAT*

A SINGLE SHOT BROKE THE morning stillness and sent the dozing pigeons into anxious flight, weaving and circling until they once again fell into place on the steps of the church. No one appeared on the empty street in the Congo, and Leopoldville again was quiet. One sniper mattered little.

The small middle-aged man closed the door softly behind him, and sitting on the steps to the street, he put on his shoes. It would never do for Mrs. Katsya to hear him going out at such an early hour, especially when he had told her last night that his next flight was not until four in the afternoon. She would just run out and tell him to get back to bed and not to walk around the streets alone. It was dangerous, she always said. Well, he was in no mood to listen to Mrs. Katsya's warnings of doom.

He slung the patched flying jacket over his shoulder and moved down the narrow street toward the market place, restraining the impulse to kick an empty can in his path. The last time he'd kicked a can he'd been shot at. Carefully he circled the square and stepped back into the dark recess of an alley, remaining motionless for several seconds to



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bask in the momentary relief from the sun.

Already the square was filling with people and the soft slur of bare feet on the warm sidewalk grew in intensity. Soon the entire city would be boiling in the September heat and even breathing would become a chore. The little man moved to the back of the alley and sat on a small box propped against the wall, hoping that this momentary seclusion would remain unbroken. He hated to be surprised.

He had spent the three days since the fateful phone call in much the same frame of mind, worried and undecided. He remembered the cold, impersonal voice demanding in broken French his assistance in an important matter. Was he a loyal member of the Party, the voice had asked? He had answered yes, but with the hesitation of a man expecting the worst. He had never been sure of his political convictions, and now he was less certain than ever.

It was very simple, the voice had said. He was to take his instructions from a designated post office box and proceed accordingly. If he did not agree to the proposal, he was merely to signify his disagreement by replacing the instructions in the box. He was to speak to no one.

When he had tried to protest, the voice had only repeated the box number twice and hung up. The short conversation had left him cold and lifeless, and it seemed that the entire incident had never even happened. He had sat in the chair for almost an hour, hardly thinking, moving only to wipe the drops of perspiration that annoyingly teased his nose and brow.

At the post office he had spoken to no one as he slowly read the contents of the box—a single, typed sheet; he was still in a daze and still barely able to think. After a brief walk he had made the decision, returned to the post office, and replaced the instructions in the box. To his horror he then found a second note, very short. "Your sister Anna will be released only on completion of your assignment." . . .

Slowly he unbuttoned the pocket of his flying jacket and withdrew the instructions. He poked the single sheet into the shaft of sunlight which split the shadow in the alley and once again read the concise orders. They instructed him to pick up 17 passengers at an air strip a few miles in the jungle, and fly them to Ndola, some 900 miles to the east. He was to watch for a small grass fire, and from this point he was to wait exactly fifteen minutes, then bail out. He had only to lock the cabin door, set the rudder pedals, and jump. On the ground he would be picked up by Party agents and transported to a suitable location until it was safe for him to return to Leopoldville. He would see his sister again and also receive a substantial sum of money. The paper was unsigned.

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The blank white space where the signature should have been seemed to sum up the totally impersonal aspect of his situation.

He was quite aware that 1961 in the Congo had been a year of much struggle and bickering, but he had never really understood what it was all about. He simply assumed it had nothing to do with him. Ever since he had come to Africa from Paris eight years before, politics had become something in the past, something to be forgotten. His only aim had been to start a taxi service over the jungle wilderness, to and from cities most readily reached by air, and his success had been surprising to those acquainted with the unassuming little man.

In Paris eight years before he had been floundering, and the necessity to support his sister had added to the problems. But when he was approached by a Party member he had jumped at the chance. The man offered new ideas, new promises, and most important, hope for recapturing his own dignity and pride. Yes, he had been greatly impressed. But this too had steadily waned into boredom, and he had quit going to the meetings. No one had ever pushed him about it and he had continued to flounder.

It was his sister who had suggested the idea of a taxi-plane service in the Congo. She had always been a rather ugly-looking person and was constantly spending his money on beauty aids and lotions in a perpetual search for—what, he was never sure. But she always had time to discuss her brother's problems, and for this he was infinitely grateful.

He always followed her advice, and in return he continued to give her money. It was a tacit agreement between them, but now he knew it was in danger of being broken forever. His own tiny cache of ethics refused to submit to the ones which ran helter-skelter outside the coolness of this alley.

He stretched his cramped muscles and ran his hand through his thinning hair. It was getting very hot now and the market was a mass of noisy venders and wary buyers, all gaily dressed and slow of motion. The soft distant sound of the steeple clock striking twice seemed to whisper an abrupt end to his period of thought. Replacing the piece of paper in his pocket, he went back to the square and retraced his steps to Mrs. Katsya's apartment house.

Three hours had passed, and he could now see the first shadows creeping stealthily through the jungle, engulfing everything in their path, a great beast with a huge appetite. Sweat beaded his face as he lifted gently on the stick and corrected his altitude. He felt the slow burn of anticipation as the stick nestled snugly against his stomach; his whole body was tense and awaiting the moment when every nerve would spring into actual fear. All

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had gone smoothly so far, but the small grass fire was nowhere in sight.

The 17 men had already been in the plane when he had arrived at the strip, each of the passengers dressed simply, as peasants might be on their way home to Ndola. The usual hum of conversation that had preceded former flights seemed subdued and limited this time, but he had simply followed routine as usual, checking the flight list and counting heads. It was the same as any other preflight check he had ever made. And yet he had felt that unseen anxiety and tension which he always sensed among passengers, and even in himself, whenever he was making a difficult landing in particularly bad weather. No one said anything—but he felt it was there, inside them and inside himself.

He had finished his check and had started for the cockpit when he saw the attaché case. He would not even have noticed it, but in contrast to its sedately dressed owner it appeared somehow striking. The man sat at the window, peering at nothing and apparently lost in deep thought. He was very thin and obviously very tired. His right hand clutched the attaché case just above an emblem embossed in gold and of Swedish character.

The pilot had seen that insignia often on the Swedish fighters, just before his tour of duty in Korea. The man with the attaché case shifted his position, moving his hand from the case. Just above the seal he saw two pairs of initials. D.H.-UN. He had stood transfixed in the aisle, his clipboard poised, pondering the significance of his discovery, when suddenly the man had looked up. The tension in the cabin had seemed to increase, but the take-off a few minutes later was smooth and there were no complaints . . .

But now the pilot's anxiety was changing into hope as three and a half hours had passed and still he saw no sign of the grass fire. In forty-five minutes they would be over Ndola. The possibility that there had been a change of plan raced through his mind as every minute in the air brought him closer to the avoidance of a situation he had neither made nor wanted.

Suddenly the pain of anticipation and fear brought his breathing to a halt and he squinted hard at the tiny pinpoint of light down below and to his right. He looked away, blinked his eyes, then looked again. He was not mistaken. With shaking hands he altered his course slightly and in seconds he was over the fifteen-minute mark.

Glancing at the empty seat beside him, he secretly thanked the mild attack of dysentery that had kept his co-pilot from this particular trip. He liked Frank. Switching the automatic pilot to the "On" position and locking the door leading to the cabin, he returned to his seat and made an instrument check. "Three of the fifteen minutes gone. Altitude

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1200, air speed 200, cabin pressure good, fuel empty."

Fuel empty!

A startled look sprang into his face as the significance of the reading suddenly dawned on him.

"But that's impossible!" he thought. Surely they trusted him to do his job. But perhaps they didn't—and reducing his fuel supply was just insurance.

He finished his check of the instruments and everything else read well.

Ten of the fifteen minutes were now gone.

He fastened the straps of his parachute and sat back to wait, shivering.

At fourteen minutes the engines began to choke convulsively. His safety belt off, he was having trouble remaining in his seat. Only the frantic banging on the locked cabin door could be heard as he watched the second hand creep its last thirty ticks to the top of his watch.

He reached to turn the door handle that would bring the cool night air rushing in and give him his only means of escape. His shaking fingers closed over the cold welcome metal and he twisted the handle gently.

The handle came off in his hand.

Panic-stricken, he sought to replace it, but the small mechanical fixture that ordinarily engaged the handle had been replaced by a peg of wood. He fell back into the seat and jerked at the stick, trying with every ounce of his strength to level off.

Eighteen minutes!

The treetops into which he quickly plunged clawed and scratched at the windshield before him, and his second lunging jerk at the stick was his last.

Ndola was still twenty miles away.

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*We don't know quite why, but it seems that this issue of EQMM contains more than a normal percentage of strange and unusual stories—yes, strange and unusual . . . Further editorial comment after you have finished reading Olga Marx's "second story" . . .*

# LAST DAY IN PARIS

*by OLGA MARX*

TOWARD THE MIDDLE OF THE spring term, when Professor Nicholas Caldwell stalked through the day with inward eyes and did not notice that he was being served his favorite mango chutney, Mrs. Caldwell knew he was working on *that* lecture again. For he never gave it twice the same.

During the year a chance word or a phrase in a book would play its searchlight on some memory detail and lead to fresh perception. So he would jot down, cross out, scowl at his fine hand — so much slower than thought — and finally throw away the pencil to mark the end of his labors. And at once, like a wave breaking over a sand castle, total recall would come back, submerging the careful structure of all his scientific explanation . . .

Nicholas, on a group tour of Europe before entering Medical School in fall, had spent his last morning in Paris alone. A few of the group had set out to buy souvenirs, but presently he found that the rest had left him in the antique shop with its quietly officious Chinese owner.

Nicholas was not sorry. His travel companions—even Charlie and Alice who had been to college with him—were a bit too stand-offish for him. Perhaps it was because he spoke French with such easy fluency. More probably it was because he had insisted on quarters of his own, in a little hotel on the Left Bank.

It would only have added to the hard feelings had the others seen him buy the jade ring for his sister, the ivory figurine for his mother, and, most expensive of all, the little pipe for his dad. The stem of the pipe was chased silver, and the bowl was hardly bigger than a thimble. The diminutive sack of tobacco which came with it completed the "joke" aspect of the gift. Dad was always going to give up smoking. This, Nicholas intended saying, would serve to wean him away.

Back in his room Nicholas tried the thing out. It was just as he had thought: three puffs, and the bowl was empty. Absently he refilled it . . . Then, warm even with the window open, he went out and wandered along the Seine. A bright shower had cleared the air and



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washed every color to a peculiar intensity. The river, usually so quiet, flowed with a surging sound.

At a quarter to four he joined his group at the Louvre for a visit devoted entirely to the Leonardos and listened dutifully to Dr. Benton's informative remarks — that Dionysus and St. John, for instance, had the same face. Nicholas registered the cliché in his memory and wondered at how gay he was feeling, although nothing had changed in his situation. No one had hailed his arrival. Even Alice, warm, carefree, and darlingly funny — always asking for a light and then finding she had no cigarettes—even Alice had hardly glanced at him.

"Took it to France," Dr. Benton, their guide, declaimed. Nicholas knew that he would recollect what had been said even though he was not consciously listening. His memory worked that way. Standing in front of a picture he became absorbed in colors that sang in his brain. When he turned, the others had gone. Everyone was going. It was closing time.

He stood in the lobby smudged with shoes from all over the world. The smeared glass doors blurred the June sky. Nicholas inched along with the crowd, the bare knees of a giant Scotsman almost level with his chest, the violet turban of a Hindu at his chin. Outside the air was a rich, tinseled blue.

"Hi, Nicholas." Charlie was the only one who greeted him. From Charlie's expectant shoulders and shiny eyes he knew that he and Alice were planning some last spree, and that he would not be asked because, as he had overheard, he was not "knowledgeable" enough.

"*Ave atque vale*," he said ironically.

"Huh?" Charlie said, and they all moved off rather quickly.

Nicholas sat down on the marble bench which ran the length of the building and considered what he should do. Dine where the chef performed sleight of hand at your elbow and ended up with a concoction that flared up in a final touch of magic? Go to a bistro where the waitress scrawled the bill on the paper tablecloth? Both could be fun—if there was someone to have fun with. He lit a cigarette and crossed his long legs.

The last dawdlers had dispersed. A couple of girls passed slowly, sized him up, and strolled on. The little blonde had pulled a violently pink scarf more closely around her neck. They wanted to pick me up, he thought, but I didn't have the right expression on my face. In the leafy square opposite, the blackbirds started singing. He threw away his cigarette stub and got up.

"Got a light?" said a voice behind him. He turned in surprise. He had not heard her come up. Yet there she was, not tall and not short. About Alice's height. Her shoulder-length hair blended with her brown dress. Her dark-gold eyes smiled at

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the eagerness with which he fumbled for his lighter.

"And a cigarette?" she added as the flame spurted. "I heard an American girl ask in that order," she explained.

"I'm American," he announced, and then, as she giggled unmistakably, "Does it show so much?"

She took in his scrubbed face, the yellow hair, the impeccable fingernails, the glossy shoes.

"All but the eyes," she said gravely. "Very, very blue, and quite without nationality."

He did not ask what she meant. He was too astonished to find himself walking toward the Tuileries with her. As they started crossing, she clutched at his arm, even though the flock of cars stood at docile abeyance.

"I never get used to them," she said. "You see, I don't go out—not very much."

He took her hand in his, and when he had piloted her across, he lifted and looked at it, slender and rounded like the rest of her, the fingertips with a prescient lift of their own.

"Yes," she said, "they've been much admired." And she left her hand to him as if it were a valuable object he might like to study. To his amazement his lips explored the delicate knuckles under the firm sweet flesh. Excitement trembled in his stomach, and spread through his chest and limbs until he tingled.

The water basin was a silvery circle, breaking into rings where the carp came up to gulp a forgotten crumb. A small boy tucked his dripping boat under his arm and ran off.

They sat down in the darkness of a chestnut tree.

"I'm Nicholas Caldwell," he bethought himself to say, and wondered if the name would mean anything to her: oil, international business, society pages. Evidently it did not.

"Nicholas," she repeated and frowned. "That's so solemn. You're —you're Nicky."

No one had ever called him that. He had envied boys who answered to "Butch" or "Red" or "Slats." Up to the ninth grade he had always been an unabbreviated Nicholas. Early that year he had heard one of the girls say, "Don't let's ask The Brain"—and there had been no kindliness at all in the sobriquet.

"Nicky will be fine," he agreed. "And what shall I call you?"

"My name is Elisabeth," she said primarily. "The rest is Italian and of no consequence. You should know, however," and she sat in queenly straightness, "that I come from a very old family. Older even than my husband's."

Her voice had lulled him like an April brook. Now he jerked to attention.

"Your—husband?"

"Oh!" She flicked away a white blossom which had fallen in her lap. "He just slipped in by mistake. He's been dead for a long time. And

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I never cared about him anyway."

"Liz," he said, and put his arm around her in exuberant relief. "Really, you shouldn't talk that way. You know: '*De mortuis nil nisi bonum*'."

Her head, cool and silky, pressed against his wrist.

"*I* don't mind your quoting Latin at me," she remarked. "Most people don't like it, though. Not unless you put something with it, like: you know, that old thing Latin teachers make you learn . . . ."

Why hadn't anybody mentioned that little trick to him before? At college they taught you science and government and calculus. Nobody ever told you how to solve human equations, how to live. Outside himself he now saw a clever young man who took himself far too seriously. He was going to change all that. He was . . . But not just now. Now there was Liz.

Scent blew over from the rose beds. The core of a cloud deepened to violet. Two large wood pigeons were bowing to each other in a minuet of courtship. He held the girl closer. She did not withdraw.

"Liz," he begged, and what he was going to ask of her seemed the most natural thing in the world. "Come home with me. Please! I'm leaving tomorrow. This is my last night. Stay with me!"

He could see her deep breath in the slight lift of her bosom. Later it occurred to him that it had been a sigh of relief.

"Yes," she said. "I will come home with you."

They rose, and he saw that she made no little tidying gestures. Her hair hung smooth. Her dress fell into perfect folds—so perfect they might have been painted.

"First you must eat," she said, suddenly solicitous.

"First, *we* must eat."

"I know just the place," she said. "It's near the Opéra."

They headed for the exit. At the Place de la Concorde they watched the glittering merry-go-round of the traffic and laughed at a policeman with a slim waistline who stopped a car and became staccato with his voice and hands.

"It isn't where Americans go, is it?" he inquired, as they turned into a dim side street. "I don't want anyone to see you but me," he added jealously.

She smiled. "They won't! Your crowd looks rather nice, though," she added thoughtfully. "I saw them at the museum, when they lost you."

"They always do," he said and felt no hurt at all. "I think I must have seen you in there too," he added. "You look somehow familiar."

"When people take a sudden liking for each other," she explained, "they always have the feeling they've met before. As a matter of fact, you probably did see me. I work at the museum."

His eyes questioned.

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"Oh, a sort of public relations job. Don't let's go into it. It would only bore you. It even bores me."

They had arrived at the Boulevard des Capucines. Crowds lazed along. Their chatter spun through the air in colored dots, like a pointillist canvas turned to sound.

"Here it is. One flight up. And it's so jammed no one will notice us at all. This," she went on casually, "is where they took me the time I was kidnaped."

He stopped short.

"Quick," she urged. "Those people are leaving. We can get their seats."

"What do you mean 'kidnaped'?" he asked urgently, as they sat down at a long table, all clatter and talk, with no privacy at all.

She glanced at him, amused.

"An omelette for me. *Fines herbes*," she said to the waiter. "And for monsieur . . ." She laughed, and he realized how furiously he was twirling his menu. "For monsieur the hors-d'oeuvres, an *entrecôte*, and for us both the tart-of-the-day."

It irritated him to see the waiter's eyes outline her charming head and shoulders and, with Gallic imagination, supply the unseen.

"What do you mean by 'kidnaped'?" Nicholas insisted.

"It can mean only one thing, you know. Two men snatched me—oh, ever so gently! And brought me here—well, you can see why!"

He could, indeed. Who in this lively panorama would notice two men and a girl!

"You could have screamed," he said severely.

"Why? I was having fun. And don't you let a curtain down over your eyes like that, Nicky! It was the best time I had in my life!"

For the moment he ignored this surprising statement.

"And what," he inquired with the pompousness he had so recently decided to discard forever. "What happened after you enjoyed a Lucullan meal with your abductors?"

"We traveled . . . You really must learn to use shorter words," she remarked.

"They didn't—they didn't hurt you?"

"Goodness no! They couldn't have handled a raw egg more carefully. Of course, the poor things were scared practically all the time. They even went to law libraries and read up cases and the penalties imposed for their particular crime. By the time we reached Florence, they were in such a dither that they gave up."

"Gave themselves up?"

"No, gave me up."

"Left you stranded in a strange town without money or anything!"

"It wasn't strange to me. Remember, I was born there. And I got back to Paris all right in the end. But it's too long a story to go into."

There were, apparently, quite a number of matters she didn't want to go into!

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"You've been seeing too many American gangster movies," he said at last.

The dark-gold eyes mocked him. Then she concentrated on her strawberry tart.

What if it was all pure invention! Perhaps she led a very humdrum life and escaped into fantasy to make herself important. He watched as she serenely wiped a crumb from the corner of her enchanting mouth. What difference did it make if she lied? None—none whatever!

"Let's go," he implored, and saw her smile at the waiter whose lean yellow face at once assumed an expression of greedy bliss.

Does she have to smile at everybody? Nicholas thought in exasperation.

In the cab a fresh worry assailed him. He remembered the framed set of rules in his room. Mainly negative: no washing, no ironing, no cooking, and—this was underlined! —no member of the opposite sex could be introduced into hotel precincts without Madame's express permission. He could not imagine the circumstances under which she would give it. Only the evening before, a student from the top floor had tried to bring in a girl friend. Madame's reactions had been audible three flights down, as she herded her victim step by step to dismiss her at the door with precise terms of opprobrium.

The cab slowed as it approached a stop light, and a beam from a street lamp touched the girl's round throat and one childish cheek. The luminous texture of her skin reminded him of rare, very pale gold pearls. The cab moved on and she slid into darkness.

"I wish I could carry you in my pocket," he said with a sigh.

"So that's what's bothering you! Don't worry so, Nicky. I can be very much the great lady when I please. It is no effort. Because it is what I am."

He had no time to be disturbed by her delusions of grandeur. As he gave the driver an enormous tip and ushered the girl out, he noted that the man was not just pleased. He looked puzzled.

And Liz, true to her promise, swept magnificently into the small lobby where two aspidistras stood at stiff green attention, stopped at the desk, lifted her long lids, and smiled at the woman dressed in neat black up to her determined chin. He could not believe his eyes! The angles of Madame's face softened in a look of respect and wonder. Her thin nose quivered as if it scented something sweet and heady. Yet Liz wore no perfume.

"I am enchanted to meet you, Madame," the girl said in her cool-warm voice. "Come," she added to Nicholas, and preceded him up the stairs with stately grace.

"If there is anything you want," Madame called after them. She sounded eager, almost pleading. "Anything at all . . ."

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How had the girl done it? What with Madame all sense, and Liz no sense at all!

Calmly she stood against the drawn red drapes, then roamed around the room, and tentatively touched the blue-beribboned rose bouquets of the wallpaper. He wished he had thought to buy her flowers.

She had stopped in front of the calendar which hung directly over the table. Interestedly she lifted the corners of the leaves and peered into the future.

"Here!" she exclaimed, and pointed to February. "That's when I'll be in your city. After the first week." He stared at the flat numerals, and they stirred and became flamboyant like those Japanese paper flowers that looked like dull sticks and then in water, unfolded into color and shape. He was lightheaded with joy.

"You tell me the day, and I'll meet you at the airport. We'll go right to our house in Westchester. My parents . . ." Mother and dad would adore her, he jubilated. "Our son has become engaged to the loveliest girl in the world," they would tell their friends.

Liz gave him that sidelong look of hers, intimate, yet remote.

"There'll be too many people about," she objected. "Guards too . . . I tell you what: we met at the Louvre. Let's meet at your museum in New York."

"It's a pretty big place."

"We'll find each other. I promise!"

He sighed deeply, went to the window, parted the drapes, and looked into the street.

All those people drifting in and out of the square of light of the hotel entrance. Young and old, attractive or plain, but all apparently—normal. And here he had within reach this charming creature who had come with him without demur and . . . He made himself formulate the hideous phrase: she was clearly a mental case. Thought herself a great lady; believed she had once been kidnaped; that she was going to the States under guard. Heaven only knew what other fancies seethed behind that calm forehead. Perhaps . . . He shivered and let the curtain drop into place. Perhaps she had escaped from some institution!

Arms came around his neck. Without moving he took her hands and held them to his breast.

"Don't worry so, Nicky. It's a terrible waste of time to worry."

He turned. They faced each other. And then they were locked in a kiss that nothing in this world had prepared him for—nothing he had read, no screen close-up, not even the most ardent adolescent fantasy.

When they separated and stood singly and bemused, he smelled roses. The blooms on the wallpaper relaxed their rigid patterns. They stirred and petals drifted and lay on the smooth polished floor.

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Then he embraced her again, and his young brittleness melted away forever in a blaze of delight.

"Help me, Nicky," she said, as she tried to reach the fastenings of her dress. Some corner of his mind noted that she wore no jewelry. Something else was missing, something one associated with women. But he could not think what it was.

"You have good hands," she said. "Skillful and gentle. Much better than any maid I ever had."

He hardly heard her. She swayed before his eyes like the reflection of a young birch in a stream.

When he woke, the drapes shimmered with day. He stretched in utter well-being, put out his hand, groped—and felt emptiness. His lids flew open. The pillow beside him was blank. There was not even a hollow to show where her head had lain.

"Liz," he called softly, his voice tight with fear.

A car passed. A canary sang. Careful steps came up the stairs—Madame bringing someone a tray. The room was silent. Every trace of the girl's presence had vanished.

He looked at his watch. It was half-past nine. She worked, she had said. In that dress! She had gone home to change, of course.

He sat up, swung his legs to the floor, and remembered what had been lacking in her attire. She had not carried a handbag! She had no money with her. His conjecture of last night had been correct—she had escaped from some institution and now she was on the loose, alone in Paris, without a sou.

He threw on his clothes and tore down the stairs.

"Monsieur did not ring for his breakfast!" Madame reproved him.

"Did you see her leave?" he demanded urgently.

"See who leave?"

"The girl! The girl I was with last night," he said impatiently.

"Girl!" Madame's chin sharpened.

"Yes. You were so nice about it . . ."

"Certainly not!" Madame was positive. "I am not nice about girls brought into my hotel." She looked at him more closely, and he ran a hasty hand over his tumbled hair. Madame all but smiled.

"There was no girl," she stated soothingly. "Monsieur came in quite alone and behaved a little . . ." She could not find the term she wanted. "Monsieur was, only for the moment, of course, a little—a little *piquet*." She put her forefinger to her temple and made a motion of screwing something in.

*Piquet!* Crazy! Either she was trying to gloss over the affair with French indirectness, or she really thought he was mad. He made for the door.

"Checking out time is at noon," she called after him with a brisk return to essentials. "If your bags are not out by then, you pay for another night."

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He nodded, crossed the brass threshold, and glanced up and down the street. What should he do? It was his last day in Paris. And even if he had a week, a month . . . The number on the house opposite caught his eye: 32. Instantly 32332 flashed into his mind—the number of last night's cab. He went back to the desk.

"Please call me a cab. The Black and White, number 32332."

"We don't usually ask for a particular number."

"It is important."

Grudgingly she submitted.

The driver recognized him at once.

"Grand Hotel du Louvre," Nicholas said. He must let Dr. Benton know that he would join the group at the airport. As the cab turned toward the river he leaned forward.

"Do you recall the lady I was with last night in your cab?" he asked tensely.

In the mirror he saw the man's eyes, evasive, embarrassed.

"There was no lady," the driver said at last. "Monsieur was alone, and talked to himself, so I thought . . ." The face broke into a knowing smile. The left hand cupped to a loose fist and went through the motion of tossing down a drink.

Cold to the heart, Nicholas entered the Grand Hotel.

Through the glass door of the restaurant he saw Charlie and Alice at breakfast. It would be quickest to give them the message.

"Look," Charlie chortled. "The fastidious Nicholas has his tie halfway round his neck."

"Here, bend down," said Alice, and she straightened his tie. "Have breakfast with us."

He shook his head listlessly.

"Hey, Nicky, take it easy. You look as if you'd seen a ghost."

A tiny beam flickered through his despair. Charles had called him Nicky! He was glad they'd be in Med School together. Then the shred of human contact was swept away in the torrent of his anguish.

"Aren't you coming with us today?" What a clear warm voice Alice had. It reminded him . . .

"Sorry, I've got things to do."

There was only one possibility left—the waiter. But the restaurant didn't open till noon.

Nicholas walked aimlessly, stopped in front of a shop window and saw nothing. A month later he might wonder where he had come across the display of leather wallets photographed on his mind in gray, black, and brown. On an impulse he bought a paper, sat down on a bench, and began to leaf through with sudden anxiety. He skipped politics in favor of items of local interest—bank robbery, bus accident, a missing girl—but the girl was only ten. He breathed again. Not a word about an escape from an asylum . . .

Relieved, baffled, he left the pa-

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per on the bench and mingled with the midday crowd. His problem, he realized with horror, had been altered by Madame and the cab driver. It was no longer *where* he could find Liz, but whether she was to be found at all!

He had reached the restaurant. There was a square white sign on the door: *Closed on Thursdays.*

His hands clenched. He felt as if he were in a room where the doors disappeared one by one until he was caged in by blank walls.

There must be a way out. Ask the name of the manager. The shop next door would know. Call him up, demand the waiter's address.

At this point Nicholas realized that he would have to identify the waiter in some way. The only thing that had not been completely nondescript about him had been his expression—that of a dog licking its chops.

He returned to his hotel, ate, packed, sat in a chair with closed eyes. He could not bring himself to lie on the bed. At eight he left Paris.

. . . It was winter. An inexorable round of lectures, laboratory work, and studying had blotted out all personal life. It was only seldom now that he thought of Liz. Yet the experience still flowed through him, deep and strong. It had changed him; it had changed his life.

"If you keep this up, Nicky, you'll go nuts," Charlie warned him one bright Saturday morning. "Got to take some time off. Why don't you call Alice? . . . Me, I'm going to a show."

The French locution tinkled in Nicholas' ear. "What's the date?" he asked eagerly.

"The ninth, and February, just in case you don't know."

February, she had said. After the first week. In the museum. After all, why not? She had a public relations job.

"Alice is going to the Metropolitan," Charles said pointedly. "They've got that Leonardo there now—the one Dr. Benton talked about so much. If you go, you might run into her . . ."

"I'll go," he said, but he was not thinking of Alice. "We can ride part of the way together."

Waiting for a cab, he noticed a pigeon inflated with love, strutting round his lady. Those in the Tuileries were larger, he remembered. And they had bowed.

At the museum there was a long line waiting to get in.

"I seen her," the driver volunteered. "Too small. Not enough color."

Nicholas joined a good-natured, expectant queue.

"My kid wrote the cutest letter to de Gaulle," a woman told her friend, and shifted from one spike heel to the other. "To thank him for loaning the picture."

"Leonardo," a didactic father instructed his teen-age daughter. "Leonardo claimed the portrait was unfinished, because he didn't want

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to part with it. Are you listening to me?"

"It's all in the booklet," the girl said indifferently.

Nicholas moved with the rest. Within him there was the gathering stillness of water just before it comes to a boil. He heard Dr. Benton's words, smooth as pebbles worn by a repetitious sea: about the wealthy Florentine who had commissioned Leonardo to paint his wife; the unusual fact that she wore no jewelry; that the picture had been stolen, abandoned in Florence, returned to France. It all came back to him.

Up the steps. Now they were in the museum. Guards herded them along. *Her* guards! From afar he saw a patch of red.

"That's the backdrop," said a voice full of awe.

"There she is!" a woman cried. "That's the Mona Lisa!"

He stood at the railing. Against rocks, blue with distance, sat a familiar figure, hands clasped in her lap. Her soft hair fell to her shoulders. Her skin was faintly luminous. Dark-gold eyes smiled at him, and the smile had just reached the corners of her mouth.

"Liz," he said fervently. His lips made no sound. "Liz!"

"Move along," a harassed guard said. "Thousands waiting. Move along, please!"

Nicholas was outside. People streamed past. He stood alone on an island of understanding and quiet and peace.

"Got a light?" a warm clear voice said at his elbow.

"Hi, Alice," he said, as if he had been expecting her, and he manipulated his lighter.

She fumbled in her bag, then in her coat pockets.

"*And* a cigarette?" she said, and laughed unapologetically. Together they walked through the park.

Professor Caldwell was telling his students about *cannabis indica*, known under various names, such as bhang, gaja, and hashish. It could be eaten, taken in sweet or spiced drinks, or smoked. The Professor paused and smiled.

"Sometime I'll show you an unusual little pipe given to my father by a young man who didn't know what it was," he said in one of those personal asides that arrested hands frantically taking notes, and warmed young faces to life.

"An initial sensation of warmth and heaviness is followed by a quickened perception of colors, and of auditory illusions, like the surging of water. The subject feels light both in body and mind. Though he is in a dream state, he retains consciousness, answers questions reasonably, and can carry on a normal conversation."

Nicholas surveyed the functional room. A fly was weaving a small black pattern under the white ceiling. A sign of spring. He would bring Alice daffodils. The last card of notes dropped from his hand.

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"What the subject experiences in the state of hallucination," he concluded, "involves after-images of objects seen, though not consciously observed."

Again he paused. The room and the students dwindled, paled, then vanished. Dark-gold eyes smiled into his.

"The result," he said in a faraway voice, "is the tangible form of your heart's desire."

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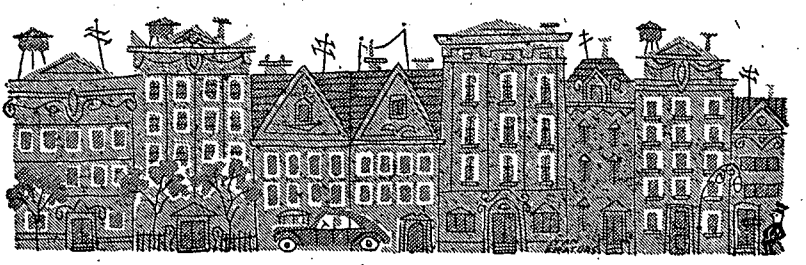
EDITORS' NOTE: *Now that you have finished reading "Last Day in Paris," do you agree that the story is an ingenious variation of a much older story about Paris? No? Then let us refresh your memory about that older legend of mysterydom: in the most popular versions a mother and daughter arrive in a Paris hotel; the mother takes seriously ill, the daughter goes out to fetch a doctor, and when the daughter returns, the mother has vanished. Not only that: the room in which the girl left her mother has also vanished—and everyone in the hotel insists there never was a mother, that the daughter arrived at the hotel alone . . . Remember now?*

*Cheers to Olga Marx! She has taken a leaf (rather, a world-famous portrait) out of present-day events, and has fashioned a wholly new tale—a contemporary version that adds a new dimension to the old Parisian mystery . . .* n'est-ce-pas?



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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **RUFUS KING**

TITLE: ***Three Paths To Choose***

TYPE: Medical Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Dr. Colin Starr

LOCALE: Laurel Falls, Ohio

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *From the rugged hills, each morning at nine, came the ritual of the signal smoke—and then one morning there was no smoke . . . a Dr. Colin Starr medical mystery.*

SIX PEOPLE WERE INVOLVED, IF you counted the one who was killed. Against them stood the law, while between, there was Dr. Colin Starr.

On January 11th, at nine A.M. Mrs. Beckfort did not see the smoke. The windows of her room looked backward toward the hills, the rugged hills of southeastern Ohio, at the foot of which the town lay—Laurel Falls, on the bank of the Onega River.

It was the sole room in the spacious house which she had retained for her own use. The rest, with their elegance polished to the bone, were occupied by paying guests. Elsa had been born in it twenty-two years ago, and Mrs. Beckfort's husband Arthur, with his gentle vagaries and inspired lack of the slightest speculative sense, had died in it with diminishing splendor seven years back.

The smoke was not there by ten.

Panic seized Mrs. Beckfort at eleven o'clock, and she dialed the telephone which rested on a stand within reach of her wheel chair. An impersonally courteous voice said, "Dr. Starr's secretary speaking."

"Miss Wadsworth, this is Mrs. Beckfort. May I speak with the Doctor, please?"

"Certainly, Mrs. Beckfort."

Even over the wire, Starr's voice kept its friendly ability to reassure

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her instantly, as it always had, bulwarking her morale through the lean last years.

"Good morning!"

"Oh, good morning, Doctor."

"Are the knees bothering you again?"

"No; you'll think me terribly silly, but it's Elsa."

"Yes?"

"You see, there was no smoke."

Starr knew what she meant. It was a ritual, the smoke, between Mrs. Beckfort's daughter Elsa and herself. Simple and direct as all things were which dealt with wilderness (not wilderness, exactly, but a place removed from the accessories of society such as electricity and the telephone), the signal smoke at nine every morning had been a greeting to Mrs. Beckfort from Elsa, and an assurance that all was well.

The habit had started a year ago when Elsa had married Joel Durbank and they'd gone to live in a cabin near a forge which he'd built in the hills. Joel turned out wrought-iron objects at the forge with (Starr always thought) a plethora of muscular strength and little else.

He said, "But wouldn't Joel come in if anything were wrong?"

"That's it. Joel isn't out there. He went to Columbus the day before yesterday about some show he's arranging for his primitives."

"Was the smoke there yesterday morning?"

"Yes, just at nine."

"Possibly Elsa is coming to town?"

"Even so, Doctor, she would have sent the signal. I'm afraid she's ill. I'm worried that there might have been an accident. The forge is so isolated, Doctor."

"I'll run out there, Mrs. Beckfort. I can leave in twenty minutes."

Her relief was evident.

"You'll let me know?"

"Yes, I'll let you know."

Elsa's body lay cupped in snow, in a sheeted pocket fifteen feet beneath the lip of a path which the frost had hardened into iron.

No blood was on the snow. Her face, in death, glowed splotchily bright, the way flesh does with freezing—a cherry red. A stand of black walnut trees brooded under the flat and chill gray sky. Down the rugged hillside several miles off toward a bleak horizon, the chimneys of Laurel Falls penciled smoke straight up into the clear, bitterly cold air.

Dr. Starr knew the Luffberry boy fairly well, as well as you could get to know anyone elementally primal. He had pulled Jeff back from typhoid late last year.

"How does it happen you were waiting here, Jeff?"

"There wasn't any smoke."

Jeff's voice was soft, oddly soft to go with his build, and with his face and hands which seemed blocked out in dark mahogany.

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"Been here long?"

"No, Doctor. Two or three minutes before you came."

"Take my car, will you? Pete's filling station has the nearest phone. Ask him to get in touch with the Sheriff and the Coroner. You'd better wait and come back with them."

"All right . . . Doctor—"

"Yes?"

"The stove in the cabin's cold."

"Then she must have fallen last night, Jeff."

"It was stone-cold last night."

"You were here?"

"I figured Mrs. Durbank had gone into town."

Starr started to say something, but Jeff was gone, suddenly, with that animal ability of his to vanish, rather than just to move off, among the trees. Starr found toeholds down the steep cliff. The hard surface of the ground told him nothing when he reached it. No footprints broke the flat of surrounding snow patches, and his own were the first to cut the one where Elsa lay.

Yes, he thought, that was correct: she had slipped on the path, and landed down here on her back. Knocked her unconscious. Then the cold had got her, caught her easily as it did the habitually ill-nourished and, as he knew her to be, the worn-out with fatigue. Lethargy would have overpowered her before she had revived, then coma and, in it, death.

A metallic firmness of her flesh assured him nothing could be done. A certain difference about her appearance disturbed him: a difference between the way he usually had seen Elsa Durbank and as he saw her now—a certain neatness about the jacket, the collar being buttoned primly up about her throat (that was it) and it had always been with a loosely worn woolen scarf that Starr remembered her when out of doors.

He undid the high collar. Its upper edge had pressed snugly just below her chin, and like her face (his eyes grew sharp with shock), the smooth stiffened throat showed cherry-red marks too!

Sheriff Dixlow had received his appointment from his political abilities rather than through any aptitude or experience in the solution of obscure crimes. His voice especially was freighted with a politically valuable charm—a curiously sensitive instrument housed in a large and rather gloomy shell.

He arrived with Jeff Luffberry and two deputies. He was moderately annoyed at the physical inconvenience of having to descend the cliff. He was definitely annoyed at the bitter cold. He had every intention of getting this business through quick.

"The Coroner could not come, Doctor. He's in bed with a touch of flu. Your report will cover things. Start getting her up the cliff, men. She slipped on that path, fell, froze to death. That's right, Doctor?"

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Starr idly watched one deputy fasten ropes. He saw the other deputy and Jeff Luffberry up on the path, waiting to haul the body up. Jeff's face was rigid, and there seemed no sense in his eyes.

"I suggest that one of your deputies make an examination."

"Really? Why?"

Starr held his voice low. "I think Mrs. Durbank was killed, and that her body was then dropped from the path onto the snow. It's simply an opinion which I would prefer to have one of your men decide for himself."

Dixlow viewed this thoughtfully from the political vantage points, and decided to be pleased. Starr followed the workings of his mind: a woman of no importance, Dixlow would be thinking, but one whose family had been socially and financially prominent in the life of Laurel Falls; color, too, in this business of her husband hammering out those iron things, the Bohemian touch. Sure to be a good press, and certainly the set-up seemed simple enough.

Dixlow's brooding eyes traveled slowly upward toward the path. They came to rest on young Luffberry and stayed there.

"He was on the scene when you got here, wasn't he, Doctor?"

"Yes."

Sheriff Dixlow said, "Hmm!"

The deputies took Elsa Durbank's body into Laurel Falls in Dixlow's car. Dixlow (now that he was in for it) intended to go in with Starr after he'd looked things over. Things—and Jeff Luffberry. He wanted Jeff to show him just what he'd done when he found the stove cold that morning, and when he'd found it cold the night before.

The cabin was icy. There were three rooms. The front, and only, door opened into a general living room. Two doors in this room led into a kitchen and a bedroom. There were four windows: two in the living room and one each in the kitchen and bedroom. All were shut.

The furniture and arrangements were crudely individual except for the cookstove. The woodwork had been hewn and fashioned by Joel Durbank's muscular hands, the utensils pounded out by him at the adjacent forge. Starr did not consider the iron things primitive, but plain silly, and as having the difference between a child's stumbling efforts and the precious frugality of a Laurencin sketch.

Dixlow's body brooded like a grim and forceful shadow beside the frigid cookstove, while his utterly charming and cultured voice went on with its questions: "How long have you known the Durbanks, Mr. Luffberry?"

"Since soon after they came here, Sheriff."

"You work on the Fenner farm, don't you, over on the main road?"

"Yes."

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"Had you known the Durbanks before they settled here?"

"No. I gave him a hand when he put up the forge."

"I see. And the friendship ripened?"

"I helped now and then, when he was away. She wasn't very strong."

"Not much of a life for her here, I imagine, when you consider her background."

"She never said."

"But you could see?"

"Anybody could see, Sheriff."

Starr recognized the trend—a quiet stalking on velvet pads toward the commonplace crime of passion: young Luffberry's untamed virility, Elsa's charm, her interest in him, her occasional dependence on him during Joel's absences. And the thing that disturbed him most was that psychologically the motive, in Jeff's case, might be sound; the motive, but not the method with which he believed that Mrs. Durbank had been put to death.

He said, "I've known Mrs. Durbank rather well for a good many years, Sheriff. I think I can assure you that her devotion for her husband was exceptional."

"Exceptional?"

"In its strength, Sheriff. She loved him so completely that no one else, that nothing else, seemed to exist."

Dixlow smiled.

"I'm glad you told me that, Doctor." He stared with an impersonal insolence at Jeff, neatly arranging in his mind the familiar recipe, and then said, "We know that Mrs. Durbank was alive at nine o'clock yesterday morning when her mother, Mrs. Beckfort, saw the signal smoke. According to your story, Mr. Luffberry, you came here at seven last night and found the stove cold. You thought that Mrs. Durbank had gone into town. You returned this morning when you failed to see the signal smoke, and becoming worried, you searched the woods, the paths, and found Mrs. Durbank's body. Why were you worried, Mr. Luffberry? What caused you to change your opinion that she had simply gone into town and was presumably staying with her mother?"

"You wouldn't understand."

"On the contrary, I have the most open sort of a mind. You've told us that everything here was in order, nothing upset, the bed neatly made, the dishes, the cooking things clean. Was it just a presentiment, Mr. Luffberry?"

"Yes. I knew she was dead."

("And that," Starr thought, "is the truth." He had met enough in his career of such extra-sensory phenomena, or whatever people cared to label them, to keep his mind receptive to belief.)

Dixlow stopped smiling.

"On Dr. Starr's advice, I am arranging for an autopsy. Have you anything to say, Mr. Luffberry?"

"What are you getting at, Sheriff?"

"Just the facts we'll have to

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know eventually. Funny thing, the different ways in which a woman will react. Take the mental type like Mrs. Durbank, sufficiently sophisticated, intellectual, and well-bred. Did she repulse you immediately, or did you both discuss the matter for a while? I mean, did you have to sit here and listen to her explain this unique love, this blinding sense of loyalty she felt for her husband, while your—well, more primal urges were driving you into a state of temporary insanity? I suppose that is what you *will* plead, Mr. Luffberry?"

Starr could have told him it would happen. Jeff's fist struck once, on the point of the chin, and Dixlow lay unconscious on the floor, while in the utter stillness of the icy house, the sound of monotonous crying came from the living room.

Starr followed Jeff in. He saw a girl sitting on a stool, her face ugly with tears.

"Hello, Martha," Jeff said. He turned to Starr. "She's the teacher in that school up the line. We're going to be married." He walked over. "Let's get going, Martha."

"I heard him, Jeff." She stopped crying long enough to stare bleakly through the bedroom doorway at Dixlow's long legs and shoes. One shoe was beginning to twitch.

"He's crazy, Martha. Why did you come here?"

"I followed you. I followed you last night."

Nothing was so trenchant as the shocks of youth, Starr thought; and she was young,—a simple pretty little thing, if she'd ever stop crying—facing with no experience whatever the brutal, wrenching bewilderment of wondering whether this boy she loved, whose life she had promised to share, had betrayed a woman and killed her, and in doing so had betrayed herself too.

Jeff put a hand on her shoulder. She started to shake. "I won't tell," she said; "but don't touch me." His fingers tightened, and she screamed. She said, "No, no, Jeff—" and sidled toward the door, looking back over a shoulder with wet panicky eyes.

Starr said sharply, "Let her go."

"She's crazy, too."

"No, she'll be all right."

They heard her stumbling through leafless brush. Then Dixlow was swaying in the bedroom doorway. He had a revolver in his hand, aiming it at young Luffberry.

"I doubt whether you'll need the gun, Sheriff," Starr said.

"Won't I?" Dixlow steadied himself against the doorjamb.

Then he fired. In the shoulder, Starr thought, was where Jeff got it, just as Jeff used his uncanny ability to vanish, and leaped through the front door. Dixlow gave Starr an inimical glance.

"You were quite a help, Doctor."

Snow started falling at four. Starr assured Mrs. Pendergast that her blood pressure was under control. He agreed to a slight change in her

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diet: lobster by all means, if she wished, to replace filet of sole. He said goodby.

Starr rang for his secretary. Miss Wadsworth, thoroughly starched and white, came into the office.

"Yes, Doctor?"

"Any more appointments?"

"Mrs. Pendergast was the last."

"Sit down, Miss Wadsworth."

"Thank you, Doctor."

"What have you found out?"

"The Sheriff has about twenty men searching the hills. He's taken that girl Martha into custody as a material witness. He believes she saw Jeff Luffberry throw the body over the cliff. The autopsy confirms your impression that Mrs. Durbank died of carbonic oxide poisoning."

"Any signs of violence, of assault?"

"No, nothing like that. Dr. Tulson did the p.m. He said that the case would have gone through as a plain accidental death from exposure if it hadn't been for you. Incidentally, the Sheriff has given a complete statement covering each step of the crime. The *Sentinel* has an extra on it."

"What did he say?"

"Jeff Luffberry declared his uncontrollable passion for Mrs. Durbank last night—Dixlow's own words, Doctor—and she repulsed him. She appealed to his better nature. He left."

"Oh, so he left?"

"Yes. But not for long. His better nature shortly decamped and left his baser nature holding the bag. Being well versed in chemistry—I don't imagine the poor kid knows a thing about it—Jeff knew that poisoning results from the fumes of burning charcoal. Dixlow went to town about charcoal. He was beautifully pat about a charcoal fire being smoldering rather than brisk, and giving off considerable quantities of carbon monoxide. He pointedly underlined the fact that there was plenty of charcoal piled up in Durbank's forge."

Starr nodded. "I see. Jeff came back after Elsa Durbank had gone to sleep, shut the windows, filled the stove with charcoal, closed the dampers, and so forth?"

"That's right. Later, after the monoxide had done the trick, he came back again and threw Mrs. Durbank's body over the cliff, so that it would seem she had slipped and frozen to death."

"In the meanwhile," Starr said bitterly, "that youngster is loose in the hills with a slug in his shoulder from Dixlow's gun. Dixlow's a good man, but he lacks control. His mind forms in patterns and stays set.—How about Elsa's mother, Miss Wadsworth?"

"I phoned a quarter of an hour ago. Joel Durbank is with her. He says Mrs. Beckfort is bearing up very well."

"When did he get back from Columbus?"

"About an hour ago. He found Dixlow and his men at the cabin and

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went out of his head for a while from shock and grief. He came in to see that Mrs. Beckfort was all right. Shortly he's going to join the posse and is going to kill young Luffberry."

"Where did he stay while he was in Columbus?"

"I thought you'd want to know that, Doctor. He was a guest of a Mrs. Worthington Culvane. She's a wealthy society woman, a widow. She was handling his exhibition for him. Launching him, you know." Miss Wadsworth's intelligent eyes grew stark. "Doctor, isn't there anything you can do? That crowd is so stirred up, and Dixlow's so convinced of Jeff's guilt, that they're ready to shoot young Luffberry on sight."

"Put a call through to Columbus, please. Try to get Mrs. Culvane herself on the wire."

Mrs. Worthington Culvane's voice, ten minutes later, had all the assurance of middle-age, social importance, and great wealth.

"Dr. Starr? Something about Mr. Joel Durbank?" Her tone shifted into anxiety. "Was there an accident, Doctor, on his drive back to Laurel Falls?"

"No, Mrs. Culvane—not to him."

"To someone with him? I've warned Mr. Durbank repeatedly about hitchhikers."

"When did he leave your house?"

"Shortly before noon."

"Do you mind my asking where he was yesterday morning at nine o'clock?"

"Mind? He was right here. We breakfasted early—*just* at nine, as a matter of fact. The committee handling his exhibition met at eleven. May I ask you the meaning of these questions, Doctor?"

"Was Mr. Durbank at that meeting?"

"Naturally."

"Did he leave right after it for Laurel Falls?"

Mrs. Culvane's voice took on an edge. "I've already told you that he left for Laurel Falls around noon today, *not* yesterday. He was with me constantly all of yesterday. I must insist on an explanation of this!"

"Mr. Durbank's wife has been killed, Mrs. Culvane."

After a pause, Mrs. Culvane said, "Are you certain we are speaking about the same Mr. Durbank, Doctor? Joel Durbank, the one who does those magnificent primitives in wrought iron?"

"Yes, that's right."

"And you did say his—wife?"

"Yes."

There was a longer pause still.

"I suppose you are in touch with Mr. Durbank, Doctor?"

"I expect to see him very soon."

"Then will you offer him my condolences, please?"

"Certainly."

"Also,"—and Mrs. Culvane's laugh was definitive and brief—"my regrets."

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The line clicked, and Starr smiled faintly at Miss Wadsworth.

"The usual perfect alibi," he said. "Had you seriously considered Mr. Durbank, Doctor? I mean, he and Elsa—everyone felt it one of those blinding things, a real, a deep true love match, if that isn't slopping over into mawkishness."

"No, things don't happen like that. Nature abhors, biologically, a balance. One love invariably is the stronger of any two, flames actively like a fire near which the other basks, finds warmth—a fire—" Starr's virile, pleasant face hardened into thoughtful lines. He said abruptly, "Call Mrs. Beckfort's house, please. Get Durbank on the wire."

Within the twenty minutes which it took for Joel Durbank to leave Mrs. Beckfort's house and reach Starr's office, Starr did three things. The first consisted of a phone call to District Attorney Hefferfield. It occupied a full ten minutes, and hauled Mr. Hefferfield's temperature from iced skepticism up to a fever of promised activity.

The second was brief. He phoned the *Sentinel* and asked for their weather forecast of the day before yesterday. It had read: *Cloudy, with increasing cold.*

The third consisted in asking Miss Wadsworth to run upstairs to his dressing room and get his revolver from the small right-hand bureau drawer. Starr placed the revolver on his desk. He selected two instruments from a cabinet in the operating room, then returned to the desk.

He said to Miss Wadsworth, "Once upon a time a blind man stood on the lip of a precipice and, so he thought, his sight was miraculously restored. The man turned his back on the chasm and saw before him three paths, and a voice said to him, 'One of these paths will lead you backward along your life to safety.' "

Starr smiled at the frightened look on Miss Wadsworth's wholesome, matter-of-fact face. "No, I haven't gone mad. I'm simply wondering which path he will choose."

Joel Durbank came into the office a few minutes before five.

Early dark of winter had blotted out the day, and two lamps glowed in the shadowed room. Starr was impressed, as he habitually found himself, by the magnificent physique and classical perfection of features with which young Durbank was accustomed to stun (in varying degrees) the members of either sex.

Starr also caught the radiation of Durbank's equally magnificent conceit and self-centered assurance that the world was a better and certainly a more pictorial place because Joel Durbank was in it.

Starr offered his condolences; he asked Durbank to sit down.

The doctor said, "I thought you would like to know, Joel, that Elsa didn't suffer. I can assure you of that."

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A faint tightness about Durbank's handsome eyes smoothed from relief.

"Thank you, Doctor."

"It occurred to me that you would also like to know just how things stand."

Durbank's look flicked casually toward the revolver which lay beneath a partially masking sheet of notepaper on the desk top.

"I do know, Doctor."

"Oh, then you've heard from District Attorney Hefferfield?"

The tightness returned. "Hefferfield?"

"Yes. He phoned me shortly before you came. About that girl the Sheriff's holding, about Martha."

"Yes?"

"She thinks now that she made a mistake. That's natural, when you consider she was driven into hysteria, and that her nerves are still fairly shot."

"Then she didn't see anything, after all?"

"Oh, yes, she saw something, all right, something which she claims is just on the fringe of her memory, and which any moment may make quite clear. But she thinks her mistake was in the time. Whatever she saw, she now says that she didn't see it last night. She saw it the night before."

Durbank said quickly, "That's impossible, Doctor. Elsa was alive yesterday morning. She lighted the signal fire yesterday morning."

"Hefferfield was puzzled by that, too. He feels that unless Martha is more than ever confused by hysteria, there are two possibilities about that fire. He thinks young Luffberry may have set it himself to delay a search for Elsa, which doesn't make much sense, or else that some sort of time-bomb device was used."

Durbank's voice was careful. "Has he talked this over with the Sheriff?"

"No, he thought of it only a quarter of an hour ago, when he was questioning Martha at Dixlow's house."

"House? Isn't she being held in the county jail?"

"No, she's with Mrs. Dixlow. They thought it better for Martha's nerves—that a clear memory of whatever it was she saw on the night before last, would return to her more quickly. Hefferfield's looking into that fire business in the morning—going to have the ashes sifted, that sort of thing."

Durbank stood up, towered handsomely in the glow from the desk lamp. "I'll take it up with the Sheriff myself. I'm going out to the cabin now to join the search."

"Be careful, Joel."

"Don't worry."

"Have you a gun?"

"No. I'll get one from the Sheriff."

"Take mine. I had planned to be with the posse, but a case is keeping me in town."

Durbank pocketed the revolver. "Thanks, Doctor."

"*Three paths*," thought Starr, "—

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*one led to a youngster bleeding like a shot animal in some fastness of the hills, and one led to dead ashes of a fire, while the last led toward that bourne from which—"*

The shot cracked crisply in the chill night air; and the scene arranged in the lighted window of the living room of Dixlow's house changed slowly according to plan.

Martha Dean's hands clasped spasmodically on her breast, and she sank forward in the chair and toppled onto the floor.

Starr moved with Hefferfield from behind a masking spruce, and they blocked young Durbank as he rose from a crouch. Durbank looked at them stupidly, while the revolver swung loosely from a finger of his right hand.

Then he started to cry. He said, in a welter of self-pity, "There was so little time. It was hard to figure what ought to be done first."

Starr said equably, "Panic does that to people, Joel. Like drowning, they grasp what's near at hand. Like drivers who hit and run, panic arouses their instinct for self-preservation to the deadening of everything else. You thought it better to come here first and shoot Martha before she could remember the things you imagined she had seen. Then would be time enough to destroy whatever mechanism you had arranged at the signal fire; and lastly, you could take care of Jeff. Were you going to fix things so that it would seem to have been he who shot Martha, and then that he had killed himself?"

Durbank's voice stayed stupid, thick.

"Yes, Doctor—there seemed a way—such quantities of time left through the night."

"Tell me, why did you kill Elsa? Naturally, we realize you hoped to marry Mrs. Culvane, and her wealth, and that her interest in you would have vanished if she'd known you had a wife; but after all, there is the mechanism of divorce. Tell me really why, Joel?"

Durbank's handsome eyes were wide with candor. He said with the utmost conviction, "But I never could have just *left* Elsa, Doctor. It would have killed her. Don't you see?"

It was easier then. He told them just what he had done: how he'd come back from Columbus the night before last and killed Elsa with the charcoal fumes while she lay in the deep first hours of sleep; then dressed her and thrown her body over the cliff.

He told of the time bomb for the fire which he'd made at the forge, of the weather forecast which had assured him there would be no snowfall to smother the fire.

Then he said bitterly, "Why did you let me shoot Martha? It was such a useless thing, when you already knew!"

"There's no hole in the glass of that window, Joel. I took the lead

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from the bullets before I gave you the gun," said Dr. Starr.

There was something that Durbank still sought, in the deep confusion of his mind. He said to Starr, "But at the first, when you found Elsa—I looked it up in a medical book in the library: if anyone freezes to death, their skin gets a cherry-red, just as it does if they die from the fumes of charcoal. It was so foolproof—how did you know?"

Starr felt, against all reason, a sense of pity.

"It's a case of the little learning being a dangerous thing, Joel. The flesh in both instances does turn a cherry-red; but with freezing, the only parts that do so are those *which have been exposed to the air*. Your mistake, when you dressed Elsa, lay in buttoning the collar of her coat."

About midnight they brought young Luffberry in. Starr was waiting in the cabin, with Miss Wadsworth, dressings, probes, and Martha Dean.

The searching party had found Jeff unconscious in a cave farther back in the hills . . . . It was a flesh wound in the shoulder, as Starr had thought. It did not worry Starr, or Martha, or Jeff himself when he came to. Because, as all three knew, young Luffberry was tough.

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**The June 1964 issue will be on sale May 5, 1964.**


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# THE WIMBLEDON MYSTERY

*by JULIAN SYMONS*

(*Continued from page 33*)

Francis Quarles shouted to Molly Player, "Ring Mervyn Briffitt and tell him to go to the Foldes flat at once. Something's happened to Charles Foldes. You'll find the number in the black book on my desk."

He ran down the stairs and got a taxi to Belsiter Gardens. He arrived at just the time that Ronny Dobson's Jaguar drew up outside the house. That elegant young man got out, looking a little ruffled.

"I say, I had a call from old Charles a few minutes ago, asking me to come round here urgently. He sounded awfully excited. English really gone quite haywire. Do you suppose?"

"He rang me too, then he was cut off. Come on."

Belsiter Gardens was a street of tall early Victorian terrace houses in decay, the sort of houses that seem the natural homes of unsuccessful artists and exiled political plotters. The names on the doorbells said Marshall, Charambides, O'Brien, Ekberg, Foldes. They rang Foldes' bell first, and then all the others. At last a sluttishly pretty young woman came down, wearing a dressing gown.

"I'm very sorry," Quarles said. "We wanted to see Mr. Foldes, and he doesn't answer his bell."

"Must be out, then. Waking me up! You can't go in there."

"Who are you?" Quarles turned on her a formidable heavy-lidded glare. She returned it defiantly.

"Moira O'Brien. I'm a night-club singer. Who are *you*?"

"My name is Francis Quarles. I am a private detective, and I have reason to believe that something has happened to Charles Foldes. This is Mr. Dobson, a friend of the family. Have you seen or heard anything unusual in the past half hour?"

"Not a thing. I was asleep, I tell you." She yawned. "Suppose it's none of my business if you do go in."

"This is their flat," Ronny Dobson said impatiently. He stepped forward, but Quarles was in front of him.

The door opened at a push. It led into a passage, with doors opening off it. Ronny Dobson named them as they passed. "Charles' bedroom, Rita's, the old man's room, living room, and kitchen off on the right."

They looked into the bedrooms as they passed. They were simply furnished in that anonymous manner characteristic of the homes of exiles who have no emotional stake in the country which harbors them. When Quarles opened the living-room door he stopped. Behind him Ronny Dobson sucked in his breath sharply.

Charles Foldes lay face downward on the carpet, with a neat hole in the back of his head. He had bled very little, but he was quite obviously dead. The telephone was also on the carpet, with the receiver off the hook. In front of Foldes there was an old-fashioned desk, open, with a number of papers



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on it. More papers were scattered on the floor.

Quarles spoke, more to himself than to Dobson. "He was looking in the desk for papers. On the telephone he told me that he had discovered something—no more than that. While he was talking somebody came in, someone who knew the importance of what Foldes was saying. He shot Foldes through the back of the head, searched the desk, found what he wanted and left. Don't touch," he said sharply to Dobson, who was kneeling by the body.

The young man looked up, his face stricken with grief. "I shall never forgive myself for the fact that I wasn't here on the spot. I had to go out of town first thing this morning, didn't get back until an hour ago. I haven't had a chance to speak to Rita or Charles. If I'd been around so that Charles could phone me earlier, this might never have happened. Is there any news of the old man?"

"He was seen in the dock area on Sunday night," Quarles said absently. He was on his own knees now, peering under the body at a scrap of white that was showing. The scrap proved to be a piece of paper, clutched in Foldes' left hand.

Gently Quarles disengaged it from the gripping fingers. It had been torn from a larger sheet, and the fragment had only a few words on it. Quarles, who had a rough and ready knowledge of Foldes' native language, translated: "Memorandum on Leakage of Information. It is unquestionable that the leakage of information through which Paul and Andreas were captured came about . . ." Then there were a few more words and phrases: "one of us . . . although the governing régime . . . precautionary measure . . . suggest that action . . ."

"That's the old man's writing," Ronny Dobson said. "Do you suppose the murderer tore part of it away, thinking that he'd got the whole thing?"

Before Quarles could answer, the front door closed. Ronny Dobson went to the door of the living room and down the passage.

"Rita?" he called. "Rita, how are you?"

In a slightly surprised voice she said. "I'm all right."

"But your ankle? Is it better now?"

"Yes, quite better. Don't fuss, Ronny. Why are you looking like that? What has happened?"

"Rita, you must prepare for a shock. You must be brave."

"What do you mean?" she said, almost angrily. "Is it about Father? Or Jimmy? Let me go by."

Quarles thought it time to end a scene which could only become more painful. He went out into the passage where Ronny Dobson was trying to prevent Rita from passing him.

"Miss Foldes," he said, almost harshly, "It is nothing to do with your father or with Jimmy Clayton. Your brother Charles has been shot. I am sorry to say he is dead."

She stood perfectly still for a few moments, then said quietly, "I must see him, of course. Do not be foolish, Ronny. I am not a child."

She came into the room and stood looking down at the body on the floor. "Poor Charles," she said. "So angry and so foolish and so young."

This dry-eyed grief was more affecting than the hysteria Quarles had

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expected. He said to her, "Did you see him after he left Briffitt's office today?"

She shook her head. "I had lunch, then went to a masseuse this afternoon. She worked on my ankle—I had only turned it, as they say, not sprained it—she was able to put it right." While she spoke she continued to look at the body on the floor.

Now the door opened again, and Briffitt's clipped, cultured voice could be heard. "Hallo, Dobson. What's been going on?"

He came into the room without waiting for an answer, took one look at the body on the floor, and bent down to examine it. After a couple of minutes he straightened up.

"Shot from behind, distance of six or seven feet I should say, killer stood near the door, Foldes was on the telephone. Agree?" He glanced at Quarles.

The detective nodded. "This scrap of paper was in his hand."

Briffitt looked at it. "Killer presumably tore the rest away. Doctor Foldes' writing, isn't it? Doesn't help us much, as it stands."

"Mr. Briffitt," Rita said hesitantly, "what about Jimmy? He is—well, I mean, how is he mixed up in this? Did the man who killed my brother kidnap Jimmy from Wimbledon?"

Briffitt looked at her almost with pity. "Miss Foldes, this is a day of shocks. I may as well tell you now that nobody kidnaped Jimmy Clayton. He walked out of his own free will."

They sat in Briffitt's flat again, Quarles and Rita Foldes and Ronny Dobson, Victorian conversation pieces, English and Italian decadents looking down on them mockingly, while the dapper, rosy-faced little man smoked one of his black cigarettes and talked about Jimmy Clayton.

"Let me make this clear, first of all. Jimmy Clayton is a nice normal young man. He is in love with a beautiful girl, he likes playing tennis. But there are two other things about him that we must remember. The first is that he loves playing practical jokes. The second is that he worships his older brother Ralph."

They sat listening to him, Ronny Dobson with fingers plucking at his mauve waistcoat, Rita clasping and unclasping her black handbag, Francis Quarles with closed eyes, his bulk extended in an armchair.

"Here is the sequence of events. On Monday morning Jimmy Clayton receives a telephone call from Ralph. I think it's safe to assume that Ralph fixed a place of meeting, and told Jimmy that for obvious reasons he mustn't be followed.

"Easy enough, you may say. But not so easy, in fact. Supposing Ralph suggested a meeting at six o'clock, Jimmy had to play his match with Gladkov. Then he had to escape from autograph hunters and get rid of Bobo Williams. You've seen Bobo for yourself, you know what he's like. He was determined to have a talk with Jimmy after the match, and no amount of persuasion would have stopped him. Even outside the ground, Jimmy Clayton would have been recognized. After all, just at the moment, he is a pretty famous young man. So he decided to play one of those practical jokes which as everybody who knew him well told me, he enjoyed so much. He decided to disappear for the evening."

A little sharply, Briffitt said to the

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apparently sleeping detective, "Do you agree, Quarles?"

Francis Quarles opened one eye. "So far, yes," he said, and closed it again.

"Don't you think this was just the childish kind of practical joke that appealed to Jimmy?" Briffitt asked Rita.

"Yes. But I still don't see how he did it."

Briffitt stroked his mustache. "It was simple. He arrived with a zipper bag which contained a spare suit of clothes, a blond wig, and probably a false mustache. After the match he told Bobo Williams he was going to take a shower. He went into the bathroom, changed his clothes, put on the wig and mustache, deliberately made those misleading scratches on the window sill, dropped his zipper bag out of the window, came out of the bathroom, and walked out of the dressing room unnoticed. As Colonel Macaulay said, a watch is kept on people coming *into* the dressing room, but no similar watch is kept on those going *out*. Once outside, he simply picked up his bag and strolled off. Are we still in agreement, Quarles?"

"Yes," the detective answered lazily, from the depth of his chair. "Those hairs must somehow have come off the wig when he was putting it on—it's easy to distinguish real hair from false. The zipper bag Clayton brought with him had vanished. And it was much too great a coincidence that he should have picked just the one bathroom which had a window from which something could easily be dropped into a quiet passage outside. That wasn't accident but intention."

"Fascinating," Ronny Dobson said. "And what happened next?"

Briffitt looked at the tip of his cigarette. "We don't know. That is, we don't exactly know, yet it's not merely a matter of guesswork. Jimmy Clayton went to meet his brother. What happened when they met? Why did Ralph telephone at all? Remember Doctor Foldes had vanished on Sunday night, and the telephone call came on Monday morning.

"There's only one possible answer. Ralph was here as a secret emissary, to persuade Doctor Foldes to go home—or perhaps to take him home by force. Something went wrong with his plan. He was in need of help. Who should he turn to but the young brother who worshipped him? Are you still with me?"

"No," Quarles said from the depth of his armchair. Briffitt ignored him.

"When Ralph saw his brother he must have made an appeal for help. 'Help me and Foldes to get away. If you don't I'm done for. I shall have to stand trial.' Something on those lines.

"So Jimmy Clayton was faced with a terrible choice. On the one side was love for his brother, on the other the desire to play at Wimbledon. What arguments Ralph used to persuade him that this wasn't just a conspiracy to smuggle Doctor Foldes back into his own country I don't know. We only know that he stayed—he stayed to help. And when he did that he crossed the Rubicon." With a final, decisive gesture Briffitt stubbed out his cigarette.

"You mean he's not in England any more?" Dobson asked.

"I should say it's almost certain that Ralph and Jimmy Clayton are now behind the Iron Curtain, mission accomplished."

"And my father?" Rito Foldes asked.

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"My dear Miss Foldes, I am sorry to say it, but in a couple of weeks we shall probably hear of him as another Doctor Otto John, attacking Western corruption, and back in his country's Communist-controlled but now slightly pseudo-Liberal government."

Quarles opened his eyes. "You seem to have omitted the murder of this young lady's brother."

"Charles Foldes?" Briffitt sighed. "Naturally there are still agents left in London, watching all of us—the note I received was sufficient proof of that. Charles Foldes discovered something, got in their way, and was removed."

"Poppycock." Now Francis Quarles, lethargy forgotten, was on his feet, striding up and down the room, talking with bitter, powerful emphasis. "Absolute rubbish, Briffitt, and if you weren't so blinded by your own conceit you'd know it."

Briffitt's rosy color was a little heightened. "You agree with my explanation of Jimmy Clayton's disappearance—"

"Of course. It was obvious that he was playing some sort of practical joke. But the rest of it—I put this very question of yours to his mother, to Bobo Williams, and to Miss Foldes here, and they all agreed that nothing on earth would stop Jimmy from playing his men's singles semifinal." He whirled on Dobson. "What do you say?"

That elegant young man plucked at his mauve waistcoat a little uncertainly. "He's very fond of Ralph. But I know he was keen on tennis. I just don't know which he would do."

The telephone rang. Briffitt answered it. He said "Yes" three times, and then, "I'll come at once." He put back the receiver and stood looking at them, with the rosy color entirely gone from his face.

"Well?" Quarles said.

"That was Inspector Leeds. They've found a body down in the docks. They think it may be Doctor Foldes."

They drove down to the docks under a darkening sky, with few words spoken. Quarles sat hunched in a corner of the car, his heavy face broodingly intent. Briffitt scraped at his nails with a nail file. Ronny Dobson whispered what were obviously comforting words to Rita Foldes who sat upright, paying no attention to any of them.

They passed the place where the taxi had dropped Doctor Foldes on Sunday night, and turned off into a side road. Warehouses reared their menacing bulk on either side, uninterrupted by houses. The street seemed utterly deserted, until a burly figure stepped out from the shadows and raised a hand.

It was Inspector Leeds. A sergeant was with him. They walked along the street in the dark evening, under thin rain, while the Inspector explained in a low voice what had happened.

"Street's all warehouses up this end, but there were houses at the other. Caught a packet in one of the raids on the docks, nothing much left now. Old air raid shelter there that you'll see in a minute. Stinking dirty place it is—been shut up for years.

"You know what kids are, though, they'll get in and play anywhere. This afternoon some kids playing cops and robbers down there came across this body. Might not have been found for months."

Quarles said, "Miss Foldes has very courageously offered to come down to look at the body."

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They turned off the street onto waste ground. In a voice carefully devoid of feeling Rita Foldes said, "Are you sure it is my father?"

"Not sure, miss. We think so." The Inspector paused. "It's not very pretty."

"I did not expect so," she said, with the same artificial composure.

"Here we are." Another figure emerged in the light of the sergeant's torch. It was a policeman who said, "All correct, sir."

They went in, guided by two torches, past a wooden barrier and then down a sloping tunnel, which widened out at the bottom into a kind of central room from which four passages led off. Dust and dirt were everywhere, with odds and ends of clothing and scraps of old iron that had been left there at different times, broken saucepans and battered washbasins and bits of bicycles.

"Second left," the Inspector said. They made some turns in this passage and came upon the body of a man, stuffed into a small alcove that had once probably housed bunks for sleepers.

"Now just a minute, miss," the Inspector said, but Rita Foldes had already run forward to the body.

"Yes," she said. "Oh, yes, yes."

"You confirm that it's your father, miss?"

"It is my father," she said, and turned away.

Ronny Dobson put an arm round her and escorted her back along the dark tunnel. The sergeant stayed with them.

"Cause of death?" Briffitt said, in a weary voice.

"We shall have to wait for the doctor's final opinion," the Inspector said. "But I don't think there's any doubt. He was hit on the head with something heavy and it fractured his skull. Must have happened near here. Then the murderer brought him down here and dumped him in the shelter."

"How does this fit in with your theory that Foldes would reappear as a puppett Minister?" Quarles asked Briffitt.

The little counterespionage man made no reply.

They dropped Rita Foldes at the flat of a friend of Quarles', a woman doctor names Mary James, with whom she was to spend the night. Quarles went in with her and spoke to the doctor.

"Mary, Miss Foldes has had some terrible shocks today. She needs a sedative. But there's a question I want to ask her first. May I do that?"

Mary James was neat, bright, and birdlike. "Just one question."

Quarles put his hands on the girl's shoulders. "My dear girl, I know what you have been through. I wouldn't ask you things tonight unless it were vitally necessary. Jimmy's life may depend on it. Now, can you remember any place where Jimmy and Ralph used to go when they were children and on holiday, and you came over to see them?"

"Any house, do you mean?"

Quarles made an expansive gesture. "A house, a mill, a cottage—somewhere that was their own particular place."

She said despairingly, "I can't think, I just can't think." She put her head in her hands.

"You must leave it at that," Doctor James said.

Quarles nodded, concealing his disappointment. "If you think of anything, anything at all, telephone me at

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once." He said to Doctor James, "Take good care of her, Mary."

On the way home Quarles bought the latest editions of the evening papers. *CLAYTON MYSTERY DEEPENS,* he read in one, and in another, *CLAYTON SCRATCHED FROM DOUBLES. STARS TELL OF DRESSING ROOM DISAPPEARANCE.* There followed the story of how Joe Richards had helped Bobo Williams search the dressing room. Quarles read the story, and cursed Bobo Williams.

As he turned into the entrance of his flat, four figures suddenly advanced on him from both sides of the entrance. The happenings of the day had been such that his hand dropped to the hip pocket where he kept his gun. But these were no more dangerous characters than reporters in search of news. They fired a fusillade of questions.

"Is there any news on Clayton?"

"Can you say whether he'll play tomorrow?"

"Is it true Clayton's been involved in a car accident?"

"Been kidnaped by the Russians?"

"Lost his memory and wandered off somewhere on the South Coast?"

"Boys, boys," Quarles said placatingly. "I can tell you the answer to all those questions. I just don't know where Jimmy Clayton is. Happy?"

They were not happy. "Does that mean he's disappeared and you've been engaged to find him?"

"Ask Mrs. Clayton."

"She won't say. That's what Bobo Williams tells us."

"If you think you can rely on Bobo Williams—" Quarles said with a chuckle.

"Mr. Quarles, if you've not been engaged to find Clayton, why won't your secretary answer questions?"

"That's one of the things I pay her for, boys—not answering questions. Good night."

Quarles looked out of the window of his flat and saw that the reporters were talking together. Then two of them settled down in front of his flat, while the other two went off. Taking turns, Quarles thought, and chuckled again. Then he telephoned Mrs. Clayton, and asked her the same question he had put to Rita Foldes.

"I can't think of anything," she said. "At that time we had a large house called Roking Place in Kent, near Maidstone. The boys used to spend the summer there, and friends came over to see them. But we sold it years ago—it was an enormous, rambling old place—I don't think there's anything in that. Mr. Quarles, is there any news? Is Jimmy all right?"

Quarles chose his words carefully. "He is in danger, but I hope that somebody will show us the way to him."

"Will that be soon?"

"Perhaps tomorrow."

The telephone call that brought the case to a climax came sooner than Quarles had expected.

It was just after half-past nine in the morning, and the newspapermen had trailed him from flat to office, when he heard Rita Foldes' anxious voice.

"Mr. Quarles? I have news for you. It is perhaps of some use, I do not know. When I was a girl we used to come and stay sometimes with the Claytons at a house named Roking Place."

"But that was sold a long time ago. Mrs. Clayton told me about it."

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"Yes. But it has been empty now for two years. Ronny came in this morning to see me, and we talked. He told me this."

"Miss Foldes, can you be ready in fifteen minutes to come with me to Roking Place? Are you equal to it? This is important."

Over the telephone she whispered, "Yes."

"Molly, listen to me," Quarles said to his secretary. "Ring Briffitt and tell him to get down to a house called Roking Place, near Maidstone, as quickly as he can. Tell him it's life or death. He must bring some men with him. I suppose he'll have to tell Leeds. But first of all, go and open the doors of that lift as if you were going down in it."

Molly did what she was told, watched with interest by the two reporters outside the office door. At the instant the lift doors opened Quarles came out of his office like a runner in a hundred-yard sprint. He had pressed the button taking him down to the basement before the reporters had begun to rush down the stairs.

From the basement he let himself out of the caretaker's door, and went to the garage where he kept the black and green Bentley which he hardly ever used for driving in London.

Rita Foldes was waiting for him, and with her was Mary James, a disapproving look on her face. "You've no right to be taking this girl out, after what she's been through," she said.

"Mary, if her presence wasn't vitally important to the case I shouldn't ask her to come."

Rita Foldes was in the car before all these words were spoken. Her face was pale, and she wore no lipstick.

It is a tedious journey from the north side of the river to the point at which the Sidcup bypass is reached, and Quarles generally reckoned that it took half an hour. On this occasion, by avoiding the Elephant and going down the back streets which skirt the Old Kent Road, he did it in twenty-two minutes.

Once on the main road to Maidstone the Bentley moved with effortless ease at a speed which made almost no allowance for other traffic on the road. Rita Foldes said once, "You are driving dangerously. Or it would be dangerous with most drivers. Is that necessary?"

Quarles shot the Bentley forward into the gap between an oncoming truck and a car just moving out to pass. They cleared the two by inches. "Yes."

"You expect to find—?"

"I expect to find Jimmy Clayton. Tell me where to turn off."

"Beyond Wrotham. There is a turning that takes you to Mereworth. Then Wateringbury. After that a narrow lane to the left. I will tell you."

They turned off down the Mereworth Road, and roared through the placid Kent countryside. "Here," Rita said when they were a mile out of Wateringbury, and Quarles turned sharp left up a narrow road.

"How far?"

"About a mile and you come to the drive. Then it's half a mile farther to the house."

Just inside the lion-topped entrance gates that said "Roking Place," Quarles stopped the car. "From here we go on foot. I hope we are in time. Can we approach the house without being seen?"

"Yes. It's a way we used when we

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were children. Along here." They pushed along an overgrown path tangled with briers and brushwood. "There is the house."

Through a tangle of bushes Quarles saw the front of the house. It was a Victorian Gothic monster, all spires and towers and arched doorways. In front of it stood a courtyard, and as they watched, two cars roared up into this courtyard and half a dozen men tumbled out of them.

Quarles saw Briffitt advance toward the house. Then a shot came from a first-floor window—a crack and a puff of smoke. Briffitt started back as if he had been stung by a wasp.

"He must be mad," Quarles said. "This is senseless. He can't possibly get away unless—did the eccentric Victorian who built this place put in any secret passages, that kind of thing?"

"I don't think so." She added slowly, "Of course, there is the passage that goes through the cellars and comes out by an old ruined chapel in the grounds, half a mile away. Would that be—?"

"Yes. Take me there now. Hurry! But we want to keep out of sight."

They moved round the side of the house and then, as it seemed, away from it. Their clothes were torn by brambles. A branch that whipped back struck Quarles across the face, and when he put up his hand he felt blood.

At last, after what seemed to him half an hour but was perhaps five minutes, they came to the chapel, a narrow building with only the walls still standing; it looked as though it had been put into a machine and squashed.

"It's along here, by the side of the chapel. There's a big stone with a ring in it. Here it is."

The surrounding wild grass had been cut away from the stone, which lifted easily when Quarles pulled at the ring. A flight of steps led downward into darkness.

"We go straight ahead and come out into the cellars," Rita said. "I know the way."

Quarles followed her along a narrow passage in which there was hardly room for him to stand upright. Cobwebs brushed their faces, but they encountered nothing worse until they opened the door that led into a cellar, full of empty wine bottles and old packing cases.

Above them was a thunderous knocking. That must be Briffitt and his men, Quarles thought, attacking the front door. But much nearer was the sound of feet coming down to the cellar, of something being dragged along.

Quarles moved behind a packing case and motioned Rita to do the same.

Now they heard a high voice speaking, a voice on the edge of hysteria. "You're wondering why I've taken the trouble to keep you alive all this time, my fine fellow. It was to provide the finishing touch. But not much longer—no, it won't be much longer. A bullet in the head, a quick and merciful end, you'll agree. Then the body discovered in the passage leading to the chapel. And by the time they find it, Ralph the wicked brother will be a long way off where they can't possibly catch him Wicked, wicked Ralph."

The voice came nearer. Quarles called out loudly, "It's no use. Put up your hands."

From the end of the cellar there was a spurt of flame. Quarles fired as soon as he saw the flash, and was rewarded by

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a howl of rage and anger. He rushed forward and grappled with an assailant who was no more than a shape in darkness, bearing him to the ground at the same moment that the door above opened and the pencil beams of half a dozen torches pierced the darkness.

"Why, it's you, Quarles," Briffitt's voice said. "Have you got him? Have you got Ralph Clayton?"

Quarles straightened up, retaining his grip on the thing that now whimpered beneath him on the floor. "Ralph Clayton died in Korea, Briffitt, years ago. Here's your murderer."

The beams of light played now on the face of the man on the floor.

"Ronny Dobson," Briffitt said. "But why—"

"You call him Dobson, but don't forget that his name is really Dombos," Quarles said. "But there's someone else here who's much more interesting."

"Jimmy," Rita Foldes said. She bent down by the figure beside Dobson, bound hand and foot and a gag in his mouth; but the torchlight showed the bright unmistakable red hair.

Quarles cut the bonds with a knife, and Jimmy Clayton groaned and stretched.

"Take them upstairs," Briffitt said.

In the great empty drawing room upstairs, its windows looking out on the desolate courtyard and drive, Jimmy Clayton told them his story.

"I got the telephone call early on Monday morning," he said. "Chap said he was Ralph. I suppose I should have been suspicious—the voice wasn't much like Ralph's really—but at the time I fell for it hook, line, and sinker. Trouble was, I suppose, that I wanted to believe, and so I did. Anyway Ralph, as I thought it was, told me he was here on a mission, couldn't explain on the telephone, had run into trouble, and needed my help. I was to meet him here on Monday evening at seven, and he'd explain. Mustn't tell anyone, mustn't be seen coming here. I expect you think that should have made me suspicious too, but do you know it was all so very much like Ralph. He always loved a secret."

"I knew getting out of Wimbledon after playing the Russian wouldn't be easy, and I couldn't resist playing a little joke on Bobo, putting the wind up him a bit." He gave a sly, little-boy grin.

"We worked that out," Quarles said. "Then you came down here."

"That's right. I took a taxi from the station to a spot on the main road, and walked up. Opened the front door, something hit me, and I went out like a light. I always thought my head was hard, but this raised a bump on it that's still there. When I woke I was tied up in the room upstairs that we used as a playroom, wondering who'd hit me on the head and why. When Ronny came down and gave me food a couple of times I learned who, but I never did find out why."

"If you don't know now you never will," Dobson said. The expression on his face was one of intense, venomous hatred.

"I don't know about that," Quarles said. "We may be able to help you—"

He was interrupted by a shout from Jimmy Clayton. "What day is it? Wednesday? And it's half-past twelve. I must get to Wimbledon." He stood up and swayed on his feet.

"You're not fit to play tennis today," Quarles said. "And perhaps you won't need to. Look outside."

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They looked. "Rain," said Jimmy Clayton ecstatically. "Beautiful, beautiful rain."

"If it goes on raining they'll postpone your match until tomorrow, isn't that right? And if the weather men are right, it *is* going on raining. But let's get to London."

They drove back in a rainstorm that was blended with thunder and lightning as they approached London. They telephoned Wimbledon and discovered that the rain had washed out play for the day. Then they deposited Jimmy Clayton in a Turkish bath, which he swore would be a cure for all his troubles.

"Just stiffness and cramp," he said. "I must say Ronny didn't beat me up, after that one blow on the head. Can't bear to miss that explanation, though."

"Miss Foldes will tell you tomorrow," Quarles said.

Later, in his office, he talked to an attentive audience composed of Rita Foldes, Mrs. Clayton, Inspector Leeds, and a subdued Mervyn Briffitt.

"I'll tell you first of all what happened, and then how I got on to it," Quarles said. "The whole thing was precipitated by Doctor Foldes' discovery that Dobson, or Dombos, was the traitor on the committee who had sent some of his friends to their deaths. Foldes must have told Dobson, and insisted that he leave England. Dobson agreed, and it was arranged that Foldes should come down to the docks to make sure that he had gone.

"But Dobson had no idea of leaving England. In another country he would be penniless, and it was certain that Doctor Foldes would spread the word that he was a traitor—though, incidentally, I doubt if Dobson regarded himself in that light, but simply as a sensible man who worked for the side that paid him best. Besides, Dobson was still in love with Rita Foldes, and didn't want to leave her. So he met Foldes down at the docks, killed him, dragged his body into that air raid shelter. He hoped that it might not be discovered for a long time but, as we know, he was unlucky.

"Then he had a brilliant idea. Dobson hated Jimmy Clayton. There was one genuine emotion in his life, and that was love of Rita Foldes. He had been engaged to marry her, and Jimmy had taken her away.

"Dobson's idea was this. Why not get rid of his hated rival and at the same time provide a convincing motive for Foldes' disappearance, simply by reviving the ghost of Ralph Clayton? He did it very cleverly at times, as when he drew my attention to Ralph at the beginning of the case, and clumsily at other times, as when he sent that note to Briffitt which was meant to be from Ralph Clayton. In fact, that was more than clumsy. It was the clue which led me to Dobson."

"I don't see why," Briffitt said.

"When you read the note you pointed out that it must have been written by somebody who had followed Miss Foldes, her brother, and me from my office. Now, outside my office, Miss Foldes tripped and hurt her ankle. By the time she saw Dobson after her brother's death it was all right—she showed no sign of a limp. Dobson said that he hadn't had a chance to see her or her brother that day. Yet he inquired tenderly about the injured ankle.

"*How could he possibly have known*

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*about it*—unless he was the man who followed us to your office that morning, and sent the note supposed to be from Ralph Clayton?"

"Very clever," Briffitt said, a shade grudgingly. "I missed that."

"You missed some other things too," Quarles said softly. "The significance of that torn memorandum in Charles' hand, for instance. That was the clearest possible indication that he had discovered the identity of the traitor, and had been killed because of it. Dobson realized that he had left a fragment of the memorandum in Charles' hand and came back for it, but I had already arrived on the scene. His last effort was to stage a good finale, in which we were meant to think that Ralph Clayton had killed his brother, and then vanished. Again, he wasn't quite successful. An ingenious, but a careless plotter."

Quarles strolled across to the window. "The clouds are clearing. I am happy to say that Jimmy Clayton has promised me a ringside seat for his match tomorrow."

Jimmy Clayton walked up the steps which, during the tournament, may only be used by those playing on the center court. He entered the anteroom where Harry Parker was already sitting.

The young American smiled. "How are you, Jimmy? Fit?"

"As a fiddle," Jimmy Clayton answered.

The swing doors opened, and they stepped out onto the center court. Once there, once he had bowed to Princess Margaret and the Duchess of Kent in the Royal box, and waved his racket to Rita and to Francis Quarles who sat together watching him expectantly, all nervousness dropped from him. He remembered only that he was the first English tennis player in the men's singles semifinal at Wimbledon for goodness knew how many years, and that this was the chance of his lifetime. He threw up the ball, pivoted round, swung his racket, and served.


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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **JOHN F. SUTER**

TITLE: ***The Impossible Theft***

TYPE: Crime-Puzzle Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *The theft of an extremely valuable document from a locked room—from a scientifically safeguarded, burglarproof room. Could Chisholm really do it?—and in a mere fifteen minutes?*

ROBERT CHISHOLM'S PALMS WERE faintly damp. He had less confidence in his ability to persuade than in the probability of his accomplishing the theft. Still, he hoped that theft would be unnecessary.

Donald Tapp looked up at him sardonically as he turned the second key to the double-locked room.

"Robert," he said in a voice that had been hoarse all his life, "you still haven't told me how you found out about my collection."

Chisholm's shrug was the smooth, practiced action of a man who knows and controls every muscle. He permitted his smile to be open and frank, instead of the faintly diabolical one which his lean face wore on certain occasions.

"I told you," he said. "A mutual friend. He just doesn't want to be identified."

Tapp reached around the metal doorframe and pressed a switch. Fluorescent lights hesitated, blinked, then came on.

He pursed his thick lips. "Mutual friend? I don't advertise what I own. There is always a clamor to have such items as these placed in a museum. Time enough for that when I'm dead." He studied Chisholm quizzically. "Would it have been Perry?"

Chisholm became poker-faced. "Sorry, Don."

Tapp still waited before ushering him into the room.

"Robert, I haven't seen you in—



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how many years? Even though we played together as boys and went to school together—clear through college. Now you arrive in town for a convention and after all these years you look me up. I'm delighted, Robert, delighted. I don't see old friends much any more. Chiefly my own fault. But, Robert, you arrive and make small talk and then, in the middle of it, you ask to see the collection."

Chisholm said, just a shade too casually, "If you'd rather not—"

*Ask yourself, Don,* he thought; *when you were a kid and somebody asked "Whatcha got?" you'd always hide it, make a big secret of it.*

Tapp stepped away from the door, lifting a stubby right hand. "Come in and look. I'll be honest and say I'm particular. Not everybody can get into this room. But you're an old friend. At least, you were never grabby like the other kids."

*If you only knew,* Chisholm thought, entering the strongroom which Tapp devoted to his collection of rare historical documents.

It was a windowless room, about 12 feet by 20, lighted only by two rows of fluorescent tubes overhead. The only door was at the end of one long wall. To the left, on entering, the wall was decorated with a large rectangular mirror in a gilded frame. The borders of the glass itself were worked in elaborate scrolls and tracery. Ranged against the two long walls and the far end of the room were nine exhibition cases, four along each wall, one at the end. The cases were of beautifully grained wood, with glass tops.

Tapp beckoned Chisholm across the room.

"We'll begin here." He snapped a switch on the side of one cabinet, and the interior became evenly illuminated, showing a frayed yellowed paper on a background of black velvet.

As Chisholm bent his lean shoulders to look at the descriptive card, Tapp began to explain, "The last page of a letter by James Garfield. Identity of recipient unknown, but signature authenticated. Can you read it? It says, *As to your wish that I make a Fourth of July address in your community, this would give me the greatest of pleasure. I must defer my answer, however, because I feel that there is some prior commitment which I cannot identify at this moment. Should this prove to be only faulty memory, I shall be pleased to accept* . . . Of course, when you realize this was written just prior to that fatal July 2, it makes for interesting speculation, doesn't it?"

As Chisholm murmured an appropriate reply, Tapp switched off the light and moved to the right. "In this cabinet I have a receipt from William Tecumseh Sherman to Braxton Bragg for money that Bragg asked Sherman to invest for him in San Francisco in 1854, when Sherman was in the banking business. The accompanying letters

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have great historical significance."

Chisholm stared with a fascination he did not need to pretend as Tapp led him from case to case, showing him exceptionally valuable documents signed by George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Andrew Johnson, Alexander Graham Bell, John C. Fremont, William H. Seward, and Carry Nation. This last brought a chuckle from Tapp.

"Simple, isn't it? *No truce with Demon Rum! Carry Nation.*"

He snapped off the light in the eighth case and turned toward the last one, at the end of the room. He paused and glanced at Chisholm.

"Robert, what was it you told me you were doing these days?"

"Area man for Shaw and Pontz Lock Company." Chisholm reached toward his left lapel with supple, slender fingers and tapped the identity tag which was stuck to his coat by the adhesive on the back of the tag. "The convention is one of hardware dealers. I'm showing a new line of passage sets."

Tapp shrugged off a faint air of perplexity. "Well! Let's look at my prize exhibit." He illuminated the last cabinet.

In it lay a scrap of paper no bigger than the palm of the average-sized hand. It was even more yellowed than the other documents, the ink slightly more faded. It was charred along the top edge.

Tapp said nothing. Chisholm bent to look closely.

"Some kind of register or ledger?"

"That's right. From an inn."

"Three names. James—Allen? Samuel Green. That one's clear. But—*Button Gwinnett?*"

Tapp rubbed his stubborn chin with his solid-fleshed left hand. The tip of his broad nose wrinkled in amusement.

"You're amazed, Robert. Yes, the rarest of all signatures in United States history. Your amazement is justified. But it's genuine, I assure you—absolutely genuine."

"But how did you—? Where did you—?"

Tapp shook his head. "When I am dead, all information on these documents will be released to the museum which will inherit them. In the meantime, that information is my secret."

Chisholm glanced around the room. "I hope you have these well protected. And adequately insured."

"Both, you may be sure."

"What protection, Don? This interests me, since I'm in the lock business." He bent over the case containing the Button Gwinnet signature.

"I'm satisfied with it," said Tapp bluntly.

"Are you?" Chisholm drew a key ring from his pocket. It bristled with keys—and other odd-looking objects. His supple fingers gripped something which Tapp could not see, and he inserted it quickly into the lock on the edge of the glass top. Something clicked and he lifted the lid of the case. "You see?"

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Instantly a clamor began somewhere in the big house.

"I see. And do you hear?" Tapp gave his old friend an exasperated look. "Come on. I'll have to shut off the alarm."

"Might I remain here, Don? I'd like to look some more. I promise I won't touch anything."

Tapp shook his head. "Nobody looks unless I'm here. But if you don't want to come with me, you may stand by the door, outside, until I come back."

After Tapp had locked both locks from the outside, Chisholm stood by the door thinking about the strongroom. All the cases were obviously wired to alarms. He had seen no wires. This meant that the wiring probably went through the legs of the cases, where it would be difficult to reach. Did each case activate a separate alarm, or trip a separate indicator, to show exactly which cabinet a burglar had attacked? Probably.

And the mirror on the left wall? What was a mirror doing in a room of this sort?

Tapp came bustling back, his chunky frame still radiating annoyance.

"Now, Robert," he said, unlocking the door for the second time, "I ask you, *please* don't try to sell me any locks—not this time."

"We have some things which would help you, if you'd let me demonstrate," Chisholm said, as he began to scan the room closely on re-entering.

"All right, all right—but show me a little later. In my den or in my office. Of course, I'm always interested in improving my safeguards. But not just now."

Chisholm moved slowly from case to case, keeping up a running conversation to distract Tapp's attention. But he could discover nothing other than the alarms and the puzzling mirror. There were, of course, the two locks in the door—which would be impossible to jimmy, or to pick. Then two tiny air passages, high in the end walls, protected by a fine, strong mesh caught his roving eye; but he dismissed them as irrelevant.

Finally he straightened and looked directly at Tapp.

"There's a lot of money represented here, Don."

Tapp nodded soberly. "I'd hate to tell you how much, Robert."

"And you'll put even more documents in this room, won't you?"

"If something good comes along."

"This, of course, means that you have the money to spend."

Tapp's expression grew pained. "You're being a bit ingenuous, Robert. Of course I have the money."

"Have you ever considered putting some of that money into something more worthwhile?"

Tapp grinned without humor. "I should have known there was more to this visit than a chat with an old

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friend. Now comes the touch. How much do you need?"

Chisholm shook his head. "The need isn't mine, Don. It's Green Meadows Hospital. A check for $50,000 from you would put their new equipment drive over the top."

Tapp grimaced. "Green Meadows! I've heard their pitch. A corny one, too. Green Meadows—even the name's corny. No, thanks, Robert. Why did you have to spoil our first meeting in years?"

Chisholm said seriously, "I don't consider geriatric problems corny, Don. Are you sure you just don't like to think of the kind of future any one of us might have to face? Look here: I've contributed $20,000 myself, and believe me, it'll hurt for a while. If I could give twenty, surely you can give fifty?"

Tapp grimaced again. "I don't like people telling me what I can or can't give to charity."

"It would be a deduction on your income tax return."

"Thanks. I know all the possible deductions upside down and backwards."

"Is there any way I can reach you on this, Don? Could I tell you some details of their program—"

Tapp shook his head firmly. "No way at all—not even for an old buddy. Especially not for an old buddy. I can't stand corn."

Chisholm's eyes narrowed, and his brows slanted up in a manner familiar to many people who had met him.

"All right, Don. You won't listen to a rational argument, so I'll make you an irrational proposition. Is your gambling blood still what it used to be?"

Tapp's smile was grim. "If it's a sure thing, I'll still bet."

"Would you bet a check for $50,000 that I can't steal something of value from this room?"

Shock and amazement crossed Tapp's heavy features. "Why, that's idiotic. I won't listen."

Chisholm held out a restraining hand. "No, wait. You have complete confidence in your safeguards. Let's see just how good they are. I don't know a thing about them except there are locks on the door and alarms connected with the cabinets. Yet I am willing to bet I can beat your system."

Tapp pondered. "There's nothing in the world which can't stand improvement. But $50,000—"

Chisholm pressed on. "Here's what I propose: shut me in this room for fifteen minutes—no more. In that short time I guarantee to steal one of these documents—*and get it out of here in spite of all your safeguards.* If I get that paper *out* of this room, you'll make the contribution to the hospital."

"And if you fail? What is your stake?"

"I'll guarantee to increase the efficiency of your safeguards one hundred per cent."

"That's hardly worth fifty thousand."

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"I own a quarter interest in my company. I'll assign it to you."

Tapp eyed him shrewdly. "You seem pretty confident."

"I might be betting on a sure thing, Don. The way you like to do. Or I might be willing to take a bigger risk than you."

Tapp mused, "Fifteen minutes. And you have to get it *out* of the room by the end of that time. You know, I could just leave you locked in here."

"No, you must come and let me out. But I must agree to let you search me or put any reasonable restrictions on me until it's absolutely clear that you've lost."

"When do you want to do this?"

"Right now."

Tapp studied Chisholm speculatively. "Chisel—remember how we used to call you that?—when we were kids a lot of the others had contempt for me because I wouldn't take chances. I've done pretty well in life because of caution. But don't be misled: I *will* take a risk. I'll take this one."

Chisholm smiled broadly, but this time his smile had a Mephistophelian look. "Fine. Shall we begin?"

Tapp held out his wrist silently and they compared watches.

"Fifteen minutes from the time you close the door," said Chisholm.

Tapp went out. As he pushed the door shut, he called through the narrowing crack, "Not that I think you have a snowball's chance, Chisel."

The door had scarcely closed before Chisholm was examining the mirror on the long wall with minute attention. He would have to proceed as though it were a two-way mirror, with only a thin layer of silver. He doubted that this was true, but he could not ignore the possibility. Finally he located what he was looking for: a circular loop in the border decoration on the glass. The glass within the loop looked subtly different.

His smile grew even more diabolical. He quickly stripped the convention badge from his left lapel and pasted it over the circle in the glass.

He then turned swiftly to the cases, taking out his keyring. Before he started to use it, he took a pair of thin rubber gloves from another pocket and put them on. Then, at a pace only a little slower than a walk, he went from case to case and opened the locks, which he had studied while looking at the documents the second time.

When he had lifted all the lids, he laughed at the thought of nine alarms ringing simultaneously in Tapp's ears, or nine position lights flashing at one time in Tapp's face. He then went from case to case and reached inside each. All his movements were swift. Most of them were intended as pure misdirection.

Finally he had what he wanted. Now all he had to do was to make sure—doubly sure—that he was not being observed. To provide a cloak,

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he removed his jacket and slipped it over his shoulders backward, with the back of the jacket hanging in front of him and concealing his hands. His fingers made several rapid movements beneath the protection of the jacket. Then he suddenly reversed the process and put the coat back in its normal position.

He looked at his watch. Only eight minutes had passed.

For the remainder of the time Chisholm lounged against the door-frame singing slightly ribald songs in a clear, but not overloud, voice.

Precisely at the end of fifteen minutes, first one, then the other of the door locks was opened. The door itself, which was covered with a paneling of steel, swung back.

As Tapp stepped in, his glance already darting around the room, Chisholm clapped him lightly on the back.

"I hope you brought the check with you, Don."

Tapp half turned, and Chisholm felt a hard object bore into his ribs. He looked down. Tapp had shoved a pistol into his side.

"I have the check, Chisel, but you're going to earn it—if you get it at all. Step back."

Chisholm obeyed.

"Now, go over there to the opposite wall and sit on the floor by that first case. Fine. Extend your arms so that one is on either side of the leg of the case. Very good."

Chisholm, from his position on the floor, saw Tapp take a pair of handcuffs from his pocket. Warily, the shorter man approached him.

"Wrists out, Chisel. Good."

Tapp leaned over and snapped the cuffs on Chisholm's wrists. The tall diabolical-looking man had not ceased to smile.

"A lot of trouble, Don, just to find out what I did take. A lot of trouble to keep me from confusing you even more while you look. But I'll be glad to tell you without all this melodrama."

"Just be quiet, Chisel," Tapp said calmly. "If you aren't, I'll slug you with the butt of this gun."

"Violence wasn't in our agreement, Don."

"You were not completely honest with me, Chisel. After you put all your misdirections into action, the hunch I'd had about you came out into the open. I remembered your hobby when you were a boy. I made one phone call to a local convention delegate I happen to know, and he told me you still practice your hobby. You're still an amateur magician, aren't you, Chisel?"

Chisholm shrugged. "I do a little routine to catch the buyer's attention, then I work it into a sales talk for our products. It often helps."

"Spare me," Tapp muttered, peering into cases. His face darkened. "You lied to me, Chisel. You said you would take only one document. I count three of them: the Garfield letter we read, the Seward I mentioned, and the Button Gwinnett."

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"I didn't lie," Chisholm replied calmly. "Figure it out for yourself."

"Misdirection again." Tapp turned and stared at him, but it was clear that his thoughts were elsewhere. In a moment he turned back to the cabinets and carefully lifted the velvet in the bottom of each. He found nothing.

He stood in thought for a few more minutes.

"The Garfield and the Alexander Graham Bell are the same size, and so are the Seward and the Lincoln. The Button Gwinnett doesn't match any, but it is *smaller* . . ."

Once more he went from case to case, this time lifting each of the remaining documents. When he had finished, he was smiling. He had found two of the missing papers carefully placed beneath others of the same size. He restored the Garfield and Seward documents to their proper cases.

"That leaves only the Button Gwinnett, Chisel. But this was what you had in mind all along. It's obvious. And if you're worth your salt as a magician, its hiding place won't be obvious. So let's eliminate the commonplace."

Tapp went over the cases carefully, first lifting out all the documents, then each piece of velvet. When he had replaced everything, he closed and locked the cases. Then he dropped to his knees and inspected the under sides of the cabinets.

He found nothing.

He walked to each end of the room in turn and reached up to the tiny air passages. The mesh in both was still firmly in place, and he could not budge it at either opening.

Then his eye caught the mirror.

"Oh, and another thing—" He walked to the mirror and stripped off the convention tag. "You're a sharp fellow, Robert."

Chisholm laughed. "Was my guess right? Closed-circuit TV? Did I cover the lens?"

"You put a patch on its eye, I must admit."

"No two-way mirror?"

"I considered it, but with several receivers on the TV, I can be at any one of several places in the house. A two-way mirror would only restrict me."

He walked over and stood in front of Chisholm. "Two possibilities still remain. One is that you might have slipped it into my own pocket at the door. So I'll check that out now."

He searched through all his pockets, but found nothing which had not been in them before.

He now stooped and unlocked the handcuffs, but made no move to take them from Chisholm's wrists.

"Drop the cuffs there, get up, and go to that corner," he said, motioning with the gun to the bare corner farthest away from the door.

Chisholm obeyed. When he had moved, Tapp inspected the area

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where the magician had been sitting.

"All right. Now take off your clothes—one garment at a time—and throw them over to me."

Chisholm complied, beginning with his coat jacket, until he stood completely stripped.

Tapp went over each item minutely, crushing cloth carefully, listening for the crackle of paper, inspecting shoes for false heels and soles and the belt for a secret compartment. From Chisholm's trousers he extracted a handkerchief and an ordinary keyring. In the pockets of the coat jacket he found a larger collection. The inside breast pocket yielded a wallet and two used envelopes with jottings on the back. The outside pockets contained the unusual keyring, the rubber gloves, a nearly full pack of cigarettes, a crumpled cigarette package, a ballpoint pen, and a rubber band.

Tapp examined all these things with intense concentration. In the wallet he found money, a driver's license, a miscellany of credit and identification cards, and a small receipt for the purchase of a shirt at a local department store. He searched for a hidden compartment in the wallet, but found none. He then shook the cigarettes from the pack, but neither the pack itself nor the individual cigarettes was the least out of the ordinary. Replacing them, he then smoothed out the crumpled pack. Several items inside it he dumped on the top of one of the cases: a twist of cellophane; two wadded bits of brownish, waxy-looking paper; a fragment of wrapper from a roll of peppermints; and part of a burned match. He snorted and swept this trash back into its container.

He drew in his breath with an angry hiss. "All right, Chisel, let's look *you* over. Turn around. Raise your arms. All right, now sit down on the floor and raise your feet."

"Nothing on the soles of my feet except dust from the floor. You should clean this place oftener," said Chisholm, leaning back on his arms.

Tapp's only answer was a growl.

"Have you checked the ceiling?" Chisholm asked.

Tapp looked up involuntarily. The ceiling was bare.

"See, you wouldn't have thought of that, would you?" Chisholm mocked.

Tapp leaned against one of the cabinets and aimed the pistol at Chisholm's midriff.

"Chisel, playtime is over. I want that Button Gwinnett back."

"Or else, eh? You forget a number of things. We haven't yet established whether the paper is in this room or out of it. We haven't exchanged your check for $50,000 for the stolen document. I haven't even put my clothes back on. And, incidentally, I give you my word: the missing paper isn't in my clothing."

Tapp tossed the clothing to Chisholm. "It doesn't matter. You're going to tell me where that piece of paper is."

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Chisholm began to dress. "How do you propose to make me tell? Shoot me? On the grounds that I broke into your house to steal? A respected businessman like me—steal? If you killed me, then you'd never find your paper. If you only wounded me, I'd refuse to talk. So where are we, old friend?"

Tapp said grimly, "This bet of yours is just a stall. Once you get out of this room you'll take off with that signature to certain other collectors I could name. Why else won't you admit who told you about my collection? Only a handful of people know about it."

Chisholm was tempted to yield on this point and reveal to Tapp that it was the district manager of Tapp's own insurance company who had mentioned the collection to him in strict confidence. Had he not wished to show even the slightest sign of weakness, he would have told this.

"The whole thing was strictly honorable," Chisholm said. "This stunt was my own idea."

"And my idea," said Tapp heavily, "is to lock you in here without food and water until you return that paper. When you finally get out, I could always claim that I thought you had left the house and had locked you in without knowing."

Chisholm shook his head. "I had more respect for you, Don. If you did that, you'd either have to leave the other documents with me—and risk my destroying them—or take them out and have their absence disprove your story."

Inwardly, Chisholm was beginning to have qualms. If Tapp should abandon reason in favor of a collector's passion, as he seemed about to do, anything might happen. The best course was an immediate distraction.

"How do you know," he said challengingly, "that the paper isn't *already* outside the room?"

Tapp snorted. "Impossible!"

"Is it, now? There is a small trick I often do at dinner gatherings *which depends entirely on the victim's being too close to me to see what my hands are really doing.* I move a handkerchief or tissue from hand to hand near the victim's face, then throw it over his shoulder when my hand is too close for him to see exactly what I've done."

Tapp said warily, "But at no time were you outside this room."

"I didn't have to be."

Suddenly Tapp understood. "You mean when I came in!" He moved back and reached behind him to open the door. "Stay where you are." He stepped out and pushed the door shut again.

Chisholm waited tensely.

The door opened to a pencil-wide crack. "There's nothing out here, Chisel."

Chisholm answered evenly. "I didn't say there was. But if you'll use the brains I've always given you credit for, you'll realize that I don't

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*want* to steal your precious piece of paper. If I had, why make the bet? Let me out of here and give me the $50,000 check for the hospital, and I'll tell you where the Button Gwinnett signature is."

A silence followed his words. Seconds dragged by. Minutes.

Finally Tapp spoke. "You swear that this will end here? That you won't even tell anyone about this incident? I used to think your word could be relied on, Chisel."

"I'll swear on anything you name."

"That won't be necessary." The door opened wide. "Now, where is it?"

Chisholm smiled and shook his head. "First, the $50,000 check."

Tapp eyed him shrewdly. "I don't know that the paper is out of the room. I don't owe you anything unless it *is* outside, and you're still *inside*. But you agreed to tell me where it is."

Chisholm kept smiling. "I'll swear again, if you like. The paper is outside the room, according to the conditions of our bet."

Tapp studied him. "Very well, come up to my den and I'll give you the check. You have my word that I'll keep my part of the bargain. Now—*where is that paper?*"

Chisholm stepped to Tapp's side and clapped him affectionately on the back. Then he held out his right hand.

"Here."

As Tapp all but snatched the document from him, Chisholm fished in his own jacket pocket. He took out the crumpled cigarette pack, opened it, and shook out the contents.

"Remember the convention badge I stuck over your TV camera lens? Such badges are only strips of cardboard coated on the back with a permanently tacky adhesive —the way surgical adhesive tape is coated." From the cigarette pack he took the two scraps of brownish, waxy paper. "That gave me the idea. It's easy to obtain tape with such an adhesive on *both* front and back. This brown paper protects the adhesive until it's peeled off, making the tape ready for use. In this case I kept a small bit of such tape in my pocket, removed the Button Gwinnett signature from the cabinet, exposed the adhesive on one side of the tape, and stuck the Button Gwinnett to that exposed side. Then I made the other side of the tape ready and palmed the whole thing."

Chisholm repeated an earlier gesture. A look of comprehension spread over Tapp's face.

"When you came into the room at the end of the fifteen minutes," Chisholm explained, "I simply put the Button Gwinnett paper in the one place you couldn't see—*on your back!*"

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